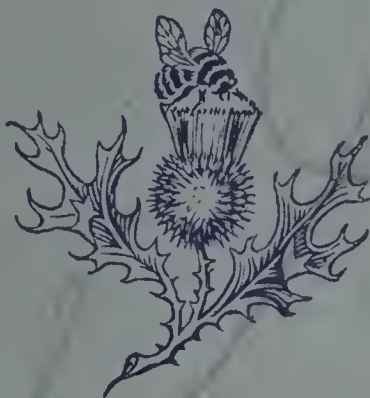


SOMEWHERE
IN SCOTLAND
•
HAY NEWTON



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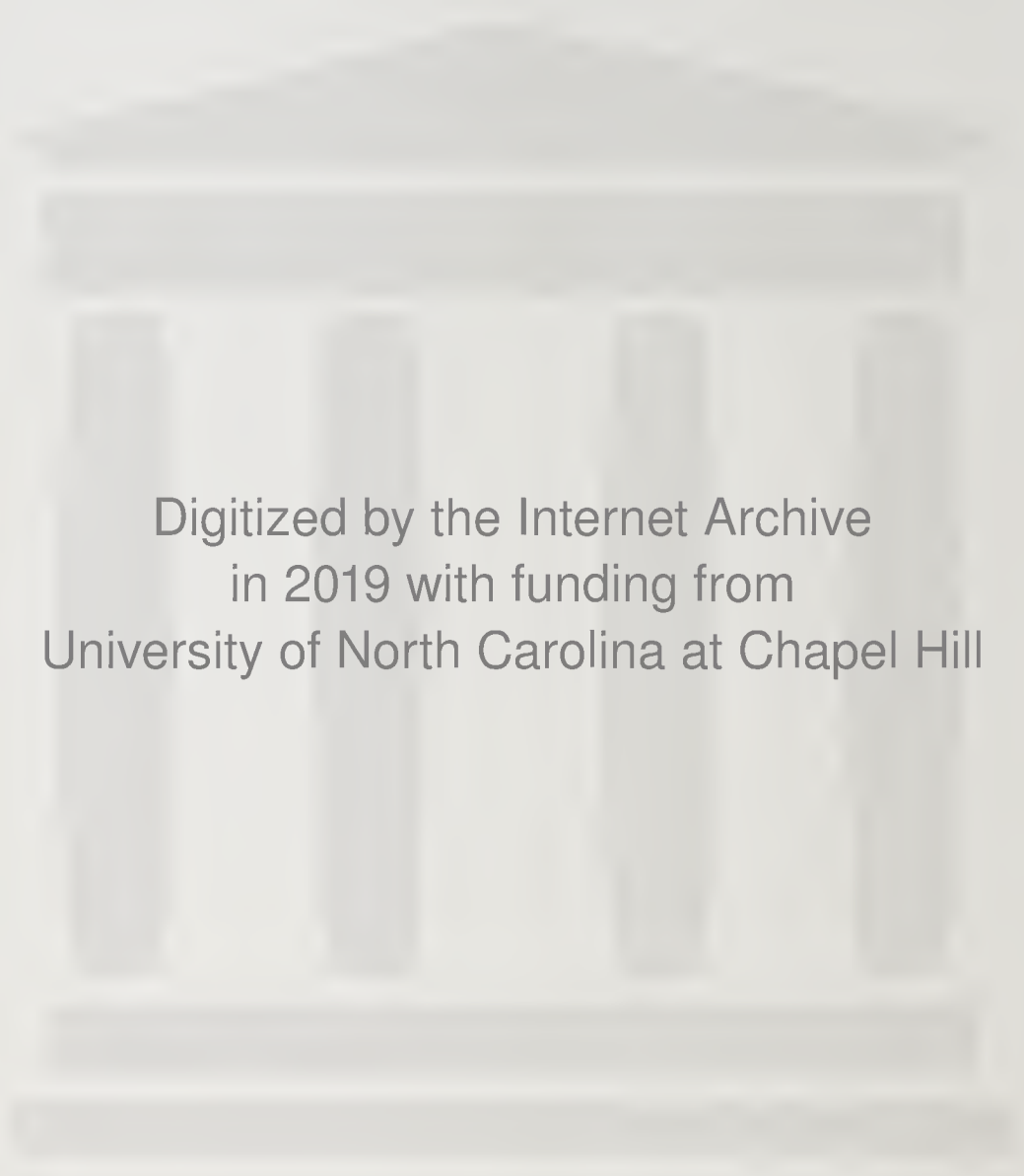
The sifting—and shifting—of values in a small provincial town “somewhere in Scotland” during the first six months of the War is the theme of this story. True to nature in its mingling of the sweet things with the bitter, there is no lack of either humour or pathos.

LONDON: JOHN MURRAY

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SOMEWHERE IN SCOTLAND

SOMEWHERE IN SCOTLAND

AUGUST TO DECEMBER, 1914

BY MRS. F. HAY-NEWTON



"Dulcius ex Asperis."

LONDON
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CHAPTER I.

Geesekirk would, in England, be a village, but the word does not express it at all. There are no picturesque cottages quaintly thatched, with odd-shaped, over-hanging eaves; no gardens overflowing with old-fashioned flowers; no common, with its flock of geese making, in solemn procession, for the adjacent pond; no cosy, hospitable-looking "pub." with graphic, if inartistic sign announcing "The Blooming Fuschia," "The Green Lion," or more homely "Plough," swinging jauntily to attract the passer-by's attention. No, Geesekirk has none of these; but, instead, there are straight rows of drearily monotonous houses—squalid in spite of their grey stone solidity—rigidly walling either side of the hard "macadam" road that makes, with uncompromising directness, for the neighbouring town of Kildree. Thence touching at one distant end, the historic beauty of Edinburgh; and at the other, not so distant, the mercantile fogs and gloom of Glasgow.

I have often wondered—fruitlessly, I may add—why Scottish villages are so dreary; for many of them, like Geesekirk, are charmingly situated.

Geesekirk—nestling, as she might be, dumped down as she is,—at the foot of the magnificent range of hills whose cragged and heathered sides come tumbling right down to the shores of the Loch that lies sleeping so peacefully at their feet, has a

position the beauty of which could hardly be surpassed. Yet, slut that she is, she degrades by the sordid hideousness of her presence the spot she might have made an ideal home.

If any of my many friends in the neighbourhood ever read this they will, I make no doubt, be furious with me. But even that terrible eventuality I must brave in this my effort to put together, truthfully, a few facts as they appear to me.

I may be wrong—"likely I am," as Miss Rankin would say—but to me the blatant modern villas erected along the road running by the Loch side to Kildree, and staring, blankly at hills and Loch—when unsightly factories with belching chimneys have not irretrievably blocked the view—disfigure the landscape that I love.

But in that, as in many things, I fear I am in a negligible minority.

Mrs. Wilsone-Browne, Miss Mysie Cuninghame and all their set would certainly disagree with me. They all reside—I would not for the world use a more homely word—in one or other of these imposing edifices—replete, I need scarcely say, with every modern convenience. And naturally they admire them; scorning equally the tiny old-fashioned cottages, set back a few feet from the road, dear to the souls of Miss Rankin and myself, and their more up-to-date substitutes with walled-in squares of garden at the back and plots of shaven grass in front, where ornamental (save the mark) railings fence in an *auraucaria* or a *deodar*, as if it were some savage animal in its cage. And, indeed, they have many of them the air—poor sickly

specimens—of lingering desolately in confinement.

But let us get away from Geesekirk and its estimates, and climb a “bittie” up the hill to where the House O’Maitland stands—has stood for centuries. Think how terrible it must be for that grave, stately pile with, I make no doubt, all the prejudices of its time and class, to have had to stand and watch the growing accumulation of those alien hideosities at its very door. And some of them have even dared to try and ape its manner and its style! That they are gross caricatures can hardly be held to minimise the insult. Yet, taking no notice of such mushroom growths, the old House proudly stands; looking calmly down, past its own “policies,” where trees and shrubs and flowers shade and adorn the grounds so happily designated pleasure—over the Loch to where more hills, rising and falling, make for the distant Western coast.

Behind the House, huge Ben Mattachar rises steep and straight; a path, cleft in its side, winding up and up, past toppling crags and great reft slabs of dark grey stone, spotted and patched with paler lichen grey; where fir and birch and rowan maintain a precarious foothold; and whin and broom and heather deck little trickling streams, that make white streaks of water-falls; and ferns, and bog myrtle, and moss starred with the snow-white Grass of Parnassus, or spangled orange, fawn and scarlet with what we call “puddock stools,” make natural gardens everywhere. Some half mile up, perched on a shelf of jutting rock—and peering from it, as an eagle might—a tiny Chapel stands, its walls showing weather stains of centuries; its tiny window slits,

gemmed in coloured glass, glowing like fiery eyes when the sun lights up their crimsons, greens and purples.

Perhaps it is not strange that those who for generations have been born and bred in this romantic spot, their feet withdrawn from out the mud silting beneath their solitude—for solitude it is although so near to town, tramcar, train and Works—have somewhat different thoughts and ways from those who have not had that privilege. And, truly, those ways and thoughts are very different. Indeed, until the War came, drawing us all together in one common bond, it might be said that, save for a casual greeting interchanged two or three times a year, we lived as strangers—Geesekirk to the “Big House,” with its wide range of interests; the “Big House” to Geesekirk and its absorbing local concerns. For to itself they are absorbing.

In a little dell, right among the fir trees and the heather, is a tiny house;—hardly more than a cottage as to size, but built in the same dignified, pepper-pot turreted, old Scottish style—which is the Maitland Dower House. Times being bad for land-owners of late, it has been let to the Patricks. Before that they lived in one of the smaller villas and had an *auracaria*. Mr. Patrick calls it a puzzle-monkey; but, as is allowed even by his detractors, much must be excused in one who has been a sailor. It was considered strange by many that they should give up a house with gas and laid on water throughout, for one in which modern luxuries are so entirely lacking. And two or three thought it showed a snobbish expectation (which

they felt sure would be disappointed) to “get thick” with the Maitlands. But I am more inclined to believe it was owing to that visionary strain we all notice in Mrs. Patrick, and which is no doubt accounted for by her prolonged delicacy of health, that induced her to prefer such romantic surroundings to solid comfort. As for Mr. Patrick, he declared himself capable of “fitting into any bunk.” Besides I notice that, though there is always a great talk about what *he* wants, he always does exactly what *she* likes! So there they live and there Mrs. Patrick is carried backwards and forwards from her bed-room to the tiny drawing-room adjoining it: whence the view, she insists, is meat and drink to her.

An intimacy certainly has sprung up between the Maitlands and the Patricks; but in my opinion it had begun before the move was made. It has however been strengthened by their being such near neighbours, and there is no denying it has given rise to a great deal of talk. It is a pity, I think, for why should they not be friends? Mrs. Patrick is a sweet, charming creature; though, of course, her invalidism makes her appear a little far away and unpractical. I mean she has ideas and ideals that it seems to me she would find hard to preserve intact in the hurry of life as other people have to live it. But to come into her quiet room—all smelling of pot-pourri and fresh flowers—brings a curious calm; and the view on which she maintains she “lives” is truly a wonder of ever-varying beauty. She declares it is best by moonlight. But I can only say I have never seen it when it was not

lovely. Only, now and then, it is blotted out by mist.

And there she lies, year in year out, delighting in it : with a look on her face like—well, like no one I have ever seen, except herself.

He is a bluff, rough “old salt” looking man : with a very merry twinkle in his eye ; and a sense of humour that—so some aver—outruns discretion at times. But to see him with her you would think he was a woman (a very odd-looking one, I admit) ; he is so gentle and so tender in the way he takes care of and mothers her. And yet, I don’t suppose there ever was a man more completely under a woman’s influence than he !

It is remarkable what funny mixtures people are when one comes to think of it and try to put them on paper. Mrs. Patrick’s pot-pourri—she once gave me the recipe for it—with rose-leaves and verbena and rosemary and salt and sugar and cloves and allspice, is not in it with them !

Then there is Sir Harry Maitland, who was a soldier—in the Scots Guards—with his polished, courteous manner to all and sundry, and his marvellous bursts of unreasonable fury—kept as the special privilege of his own household ; but sometimes caught a glimpse of by outsiders, like myself. His absolute devotion to his wife, and his unbounded admiration for every other attractive member of her sex. His fierce roman nose, his kindly hazel eyes, his huge red moustache—going rapidly white now—and his six foot of healthy, hardy, Scottish manhood—carrying its fifty odd years with an easy grace that makes them a

negligible quantity, are all part of the delightful personality that makes him, without any effort of his own, so popular with everyone.

Lady Maitland, a good many years younger, is tall, slight and fragile looking, but strong and hardy as the Scottish blue bells of which her eyes irresistibly remind one.

The spoilt (I use the word in no unpleasant sense) darling of everyone who knows her : and that, I am told, includes all those best worth knowing both in England and the North.

Geesekirk cannot, perhaps, be expected to understand how a life such as her's—with its autumn shooting parties, country visits, hunting in the winter, run to the Riviera, and London season—leaves no time for the local interests that appear to us so absorbing. And so we are a little hard upon her—perhaps there may be an admixture of jealousy in it too—and tell each other she gives herself airs. Than which nothing, as we know now, could be more alien to her whole nature.

The Maitlands have two daughters and two sons. Ronald (to put them in order of their birth), Alison, James and Bethia : known intimately as Ron, Jim, A. and B.

Ronald, as the eldest, is just a wee bit impressed with his own importance—but who can wonder? He is so good-looking, so tall and straight, with a charm of manner inherited from both parents ; and, as I believe, inherent in the race. Miss Rankin, who declares herself “old enough now, in all conscience, to speak her mind, without fear or favour,” openly announces that she could well

understand with his looks his being irresistible; adding, with a retrospective sigh, that she always was "a slave to beauty." Mr. Patrick, in his quaint, facetious way, asserts that "that gives food for reflection." Rather wicked of him, don't you think? I know Mysie Cuninghame looked shocked and turned away when she heard him say it.

Then there is Alison, who—with a reversion to the old Scotch type—is extremely staid and takes herself quite seriously, grafting—curiously enough—on to the old-fashioned old some of the newest fashioned new; and horrifying her mother by leanings towards suffrage, social, and various other isms: of which I take leave to doubt her understanding very much at present.

Jim and Bethia—as yet undeveloped in any special direction—are just two of the dearest, merriest rascals (I again quote Mr. Patrick) that ever delighted doting parents.

Geesekirk's grievance with the Maitlands—one and all—is that, "though always perfectly well-mannered when we meet, they never become *intimate*." And that rock of offence has undoubtedly loomed larger on our social horizon since the Patricks have "somehow managed" (I quote, as I daresay I often do unconsciously, local phraseology) "to overstep the barriers"; and are now, there is no denying, "quite in the Maitland Set." Perhaps, as Mysie Cuninghame suggested, their being inside the policies would make a difference. But I cannot agree that it is entirely to be accounted for by that fact. Besides, the intimacy began before they ever

went to Heatherknowe, as the Dower House is called.

I am inclined to believe it must be something in themselves. And I once heard Miss Rankin say she thought so too—but I would not like that repeated.

Besides the Patricks those we consider in a social position to know the Maitlands are : Miss Rankin, whose father having been old Sir Ronald's (that is, Sir Harry's father's) factor, would, you would have thought, have made a link ; but I happen to know they were never friendly before the War. She must be over seventy, but is still as spicy in her talk, and as determined in her views, as she has always been—and will be to her dying day—possibly beyond. Who knows ? And Mysie Cuninghame, whose father's position in the Borough, I suppose, was the reason for Lady Maitland's calling on them, and so Mysie—being the same age—got asked up to the Big House when she and the young Maitlands were children. Then there are Dr. and Mrs. Wilsone-Browne (when they added the *e* and hyphened the names, some took to calling them Wilsoney-Broon, but I do not think that can be correct, and I notice Lady Maitland does not do it), who are on the Borderland, so to speak. He, as the Doctor, has of course a certain intimacy in the House, while she is only called upon once a year, and has never been asked to anything but the biennial Garden Party. Besides those there is our worthy Parish Minister—the Reverend Fergus and Mrs. MacCulloch, whose position has its confirmed basis. They dine twice a year, and he is asked up to luncheon as occasion may require.

But none of us except the Patricks can lay any claim to the intimacy so jealously watched over and eagerly coveted by all.

This, then, is, in rough outline, how things were before the War came and made it all so different. And what I have in my mind to try and tell you is how that World War affected this little backwater in which we live. For that it did affect us deeply—as some great tidal wave, sweeping up on to an unaccustomed shore, makes deep abiding marks that leave their trace—there is no doubt.

How and why, and in what, I hope to show—at least a little. And to do so have endeavoured to bring as many different points of view as possible to bear on our local concerns, as well as borrowed a leaf or two from a Diary that I find Miss Mysie Cunningham began to keep; thinking, as you will see she says, it might be “of interest in the Future.”

I wonder—do you think it will?

CHAPTER II.

It was the first week of that August which has since become to us as a great cleft in our lives, dividing the peaceful pre-war days of the past from this bewildering present and inconceivable future.

Sunshine was filtering through the green rush blinds of Mary Patrick's sitting-room—for she will not have it called a drawing-room—where she lay as usual on her pretty, chintz-covered sofa; the smoke-blue Persian, known to us all as El Khat, curled up—as usual also—on the rose-tinted silk eider down at her feet.

The room was very still. For the song of the burn, making its way towards a river that would lead it, perhaps with many buffetings, to a vast and unknown sea, and the low whispering breaths of wind in fir trees, increased rather than diminished the impression of silence—of peace.

Mary's thoughts were busy—busy as they had been all night—with the heart-searching questions of the hour. It needed all the strength of beliefs built up through she alone knew what agony to meet the crisis so sudden—so inexplicable—so overwhelming.

Her husband had gone out very early. She had been alone for hours. And in that loneliness many problems—one insistent above all others—had formed, melted and formed again, like cloud shapes swept across the sky she loved to watch.

Now a light footstep on the garden path caught her ear and, raising herself ever so slightly, she turned to welcome with a smile the advent of what she knew must quicken those problems into life.

“Mary, may I come in?” inquired a softly modulated and singularly attractive voice as a flutter of bright colour flashed into view and Lady Maitland—framed in the doorway against a background of blue sky and purple heather—poised hesitating, reminding her friend of some gay-plumaged bird.

“Of course—do—I was hoping for you.”

Effie Maitland did not at the moment value the quick responsive smile that flew to meet her—a smile reminding one somehow of the sudden gleam of sunshine on far away hills.

“Mary,” the tone was anxious, injured, even cross; “what are we to do in this horrible earthquake world into which we’ve been suddenly pitchforked? No, don’t look at me like that. It’s no use. I can’t take things like you do and be resigned, or think everything’s for the best, when all in a moment my ships are adrift—helm and compass gone—being driven ruthlessly on to desolate rocks I’ve never seen, or even imagined existed, before . . . For—oh Mary, Mary, the boys have both got to go at once—and Harry has been appointed to a command in the South . . . It’s not fair—it’s not right. . . .”

“But, Effie . . .”

“No, I can’t listen to buts—and I won’t.”

She walked over to the window, and, perhaps not seeing very clearly, knocked up against a table,

upsetting a pot and vase of flowers that fell with a crash on the floor.

"There, now look what I've done! Thrown down your treasured myrtle and sent an avalanche of earth over the nice, new, rose-tangled carpet and water sopping everywhere. My dear, I'm so sorry. Shall I ring?"

"There's no use ringing; for Susan's gone a message. But you'll find a duster in that drawer there . . . No, the one on the left . . . Only what does the silly thing matter . . . I'd much rather you came and sat down here and talked to me. . . . Won't you?"

But Lady Maitland shook her head.

"I don't want those big brown eyes of yours searching me out," she said flippantly; "besides I've some respect for your carpet if you haven't. Ah, here's the duster." And going down on her knees she rubbed the floor vigorously. "No," she went on, the words coming rather tremulously, punctuated by much bye-play with the duster. "No, I didn't come to talk—at least not any sort of sentimental rubbish—least of all to be a fool and cry—of that I am determined." In the seclusion of her attitude she gave a furtive rub to her eyes with the grimy duster.

"But you dear, darling Effie, why determine anything of the kind? We must all feel this terribly—we're all bound to want to cry at times—and here, with only me, what would it matter if you did? But oh," a little scream of laughter suddenly shattering the gravity of her tone, "what have you done to your face? It's all smudged and dirty!

What on earth have you been doing?"

"Mopping up this mess and my own idiotic tears at the same time, I suppose," was the somewhat rueful reply. "Goodness," glancing at her own reflection in the glass, "what a guy! May I go into your room and tidy up?"

"Of course. You'll find hot water in the tap on the right—and powder in. . . ."

"Don't insult me, Mary. Am I an alien that you should instruct me as if I didn't know where all your wash up arrangements are and hadn't powdered my nose dozens of times at your dear old Chippendale glass, that gives one a blurred face and a squint, shattering one's vanity and sending one back to you another and a much more chastened woman. There! I'm taking off my hat. My head's like a hot coal this morning. Heaven's! how untidy my hair is."

The stream of disconnected chatter continued to trickle intermittently to Mary's ears, freezing into silence any expression of what glowed so warmly in Mary's heart, longing to expend itself in helping and comforting this poor wounded other heart that had surely come to her, seeking something other than this absurd travesty—this insulting mockery—of all that is most sacred in friendship. Yet how combat such an attitude? How attempt to offer what was being tacitly refused and derided? With a sigh Mary Patrick turned to gaze out at—and perhaps gather inspiration from—the sun-bathed landscape of moor and loch and hills so placidly unmoved by the human tragedies on which they even seemed to smile.

Yet, somehow, they brought a sense of comfort—of strength and peace—by their very immobility. It was a strength of which Mary Patrick felt the urgent need. For now, so she had been telling herself, the moment had come when she ought to give to others what, through much tribulation, she had learnt—or at least partially learnt—herself. But could she? . . . Her soul shrank from the thought of breaking through the reserve in which it had always sheltered. To speak to any one of its cherished convictions—its sacred ideals—seemed impossible. Yet, if she did not, would she not be a coward. . . a traitor?

We all, I suppose, have an Inner Temple—a Holy of Holies—in which our secret soul dwells among thoughts and aspirations too sacrosanct—and too elusive—for words. And in no one is this reticence stronger than in Mary Patrick. Yet, she insisted with herself, if the time had come to make a supreme effort and break down the barriers behind which she loved to shelter, it must be done, whatever it cost her. It was not possible, with bread in her possession, to offer to one who came hungrily seeking food, the conventional stone. . . No, she could not do that. . . and so. . . and so. . . . A wordless prayer was wafted heavenward on the soft summer breeze.

Was it in consequence that when Effie Maitland began speaking again her tone was somewhat altered?

“ Oh, Mary, Mary !” . . . She was hovering about the room now, like a butterfly that cannot make up its mind to settle. “ Oh Mary, Mary. . . I don’t

want to be chastened. . . The very thought makes me shiver. . . I've had such a heavenly life. Everything's always been so lovely. . . and now—now—I can see its all going to be utterly different and perfectly beastly. My fairy fool's paradise world is all dropping to pieces in my hand and I . . . I just can't bear it. . . ”

“ Yes, I'm afraid it's going to be pretty awful . . . for everyone.”

There was an expression of wonderful calm and confidence in the eyes that had been gazing out into the blue, but Lady Maitland did not notice it.

“ I—I don't see how it can be otherwise,” Mary went on, “ but will that matter if we meet it in the right spirit. . . and we will do that, don't you think, Effie? . . . But do come and sit down here—won't you?—in Pat's big chair. . . swallows up, doesn't it, darling. . . and let's talk it out. For I was . . . thinking”—there was a perceptible hesitation over the word—“ about it—about you—last night, as I lay awake in the moonlight. . . ”

“ Didn't you sleep either?”

“ No, did any of us, I wonder?”

“ Harry did. . . I listened to him snoring next door, and thought how I've always grumbled about it, and now. . . now. . . The boys, too. . . all of them torn from me in a moment. . . How can I bear it? . . . Oh what shall I do . . . what shall I do? . . . ”

Mary did not answer; only her fragile, blue-veined hand gently stroked the pretty hair clustering about the pretty head suddenly buried in the cushions of her sofa. And from her expression

you would have thought she was in church.

For many minutes neither of them spoke. The solemn rhythm of the long-tailed clock went tic-tac, tic-tac as its great pendulum swung to and fro, while the scent of flowers coming in at open door and windows, mingled with the pungent breath of sun-warmed pine trees—and perhaps something else—made an atmosphere that was wonderfully soothing.

Yet, though not unaware of their existence, Effie Maitland was far from being in tune with such influences. Looking up suddenly she searched her friend's face with a not altogether pleasant scrutiny.

“What are you thinking of, Mary?” she demanded, almost resentfully; for anxiety, fear, and the pride that will not admit to such weakness, made chaos in a mind unused to exact of itself orderly thought, and the affection she felt for Mrs. Patrick was strangely warped by the consciousness of something vitally different in her outlook.

“I was thinking of what a difference the war will make.”

“Difference! Why it's going to make everything different—everything! Surely that is obvious enough not to need much thinking. Really, Mary, I don't understand you.” Lady Maitland spoke scornfully, and that she herself did not in the least understand either was obvious also.

How then convey to her that there is a possibility of regarding even tragedy in a light that entirely changes its aspect? This was the problem before which Mary's heart quailed.

“ I don’t think I understand very much myself,” was all she found to say, the feebleness of the words reproaching her as she uttered them, “ only. . . ”

“ Only what ? ”

“ Well, really, I suppose, what I was thinking was that nothing can happen that isn’t necessary and—and really for the best.”

The flush that slowly suffused her usually colourless face might have shown the effort it cost Mrs. Patrick to speak even as vaguely as she was doing, but Lady Maitland never noticed it.

“ Good gracious ! ” she exclaimed, “ surely you don’t mean to uphold Germany and say you think they are justified in what they are doing ? ”

“ No, I don’t uphold Germany at all. But I don’t believe this war would have come—would never have been allowed to come—unless good was coming out of it.”

“ Why, of course good will come out of it by the brutes being beaten, as they will be and swept off the face of the earth. What I can’t see is how it’s ever been allowed to get to this. What’s the good of it ? I should have thought that you, Mary, who are so much better and more religious than the rest of us, would have been able to explain why God has allowed it.”

She never guessed how cruel that “ you who are so much better and more religious ” sounded to Mrs. Patrick ; how it froze the eager longing to give help where help was so needed.

“ No, I can’t explain,” was all she could force herself to say, “ I can only trust . . for I *do* believe it could never have happened if it wasn’t. . . good for us . . . ”

“ Well, I don’t believe it,” Lady Maitland retorted; “ I can’t—I don’t want to . . I don’t see why I should . . so let’s change the subject. Now don’t look so hurt and distressed, you silly old thing; I’d only be telling lies if I said anything else. For it shakes one’s faith to its foundations that God should have allowed this to happen.”

“ Perhaps He couldn’t help it . . ”

“ Mary !” Lady Maitland’s voice proclaimed her unqualified horror, “ that’s blasphemy . . surely.”

“ No, not as I mean it . . only I don’t seem able to explain . . Words are so tangling. . . Suppose we’ve brought it on ourselves by not doing—or being—what we’re meant to be?—And, anyway, Effie,” she concluded with a flounder on to ground not quite so boggy under her feet, “ whether we understand or not has nothing to do with it. We’ve got to believe and the understanding will come.”

“ M—m—m—m,” the sound was by no means one of assent. “ Well, don’t let’s bother about problems that never get any forrarder. What I want to know, and really came here to ask,”—and she honestly believed what she said to be the truth—“ is, not what are we to feel, but what are we to do? For I must have things to do, Mary, if I’m not to go mad.”

“ There’ll be no lack of things to do,” Mary answered, thankful to escape from a discussion in which she felt she had ignominiously failed; “ there’s the Red Cross and the S. & S.F.A. . . ”

“ Stop, stop, what on earth is that, Mary?”

“ You know perfectly well—Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Families’ Association.”

“ Yes, I believe I have had papers about it ; but I never did anything.”

“ More shame to you, Lady Maitland. But let’s begin with Red Cross. You’re Vice-President, aren’t you ?”

“ Yes, but I’ve only been to one meeting, I think. Bethia is very keen. She’s a . . . Commandant is it they call it ? Will it be any good, do you think ?”

“ That depends principally upon you, here locally. If only you’d take it—and yourself—seriously, Effie.”

“ I am . . . I do . . . I will . . . For I must have work—real, hard, thought-deadening work. But couldn’t you be the head, Mary, and I the hands ?”

“ A pretty position for my Lady Maitland that would be ! What would Geesekirk say ?”

“ Oh, bother position, and Geesekirk too. What does it matter what anyone says ?”

“ It matters a great deal. Much more, I suspect, than most of us have been in the habit of considering. For instance—you won’t be annoyed if I speak quite plainly, will you, Effie, for I’m going to criticise ?”

“ No, of course I won’t. Fire away ! Speak as plainly as you please.”

“ Well, one of the things—and it won’t be a bit easy—is to consider all the people you have been in the habit of ignoring.”

The colour that suddenly flooded Lady Maitland’s face did not look as if she were going to find criticism altogether to her taste.

“ How do you mean ? What people ?” she asked rather brusquely.

“Everyone in Geesekirk and a good many in Kildree. If you’re going to do any good with all the things that’ll be wanted—and Pat has given me some idea what they’ll be—you’ll have to rope in many contending elements. It’ll be no easy matter to get anything like a systematic organisation; and it will take all the tact—and that charm of manner we hear so much of, Effie—to manage the team you’ll have in hand.”

“The team of Geesekirk geese,” laughed Effie, “I can well believe they’ll take some handling.”

“Now, Effie, do be serious and forget that silly joke. You’ll do nothing with them if you think them that—and they really aren’t.”

“Oh yes, I know. They’re really swans.”

“Many of them are really very nice and very sensible people. Not nearly so silly as you are—sometimes. What’s more, you’d like them, once you knew them.”

“That’s very possible. And I’m not saying anything against them, Mary, only wondering how it will work. . . . Wasn’t there a fairy tale something about a Princess who wove shirts that her geese—or were they swans?—might get turned into Princes?”

“Yes, that is to be your rôle.”

“No, no, I couldn’t aspire to anything so exalted.”

“That reminds me of your story of finding the children when they were quite tiny playing at the Garden of Eden, and Ronny saying: “Who’ll be Dod—I won’t.”

“ Yes, like his Mother, he felt the responsibility too great.”

‘ I forget who did take it on in the end ?’

“ Alison, for sure. But I believe really I quashed the argument, feeling it was trenching on delicate ground.”

“ Well, we’ll quash this for the same excellent reason.”

“ Just tell me, though, wasn’t there one whose garment didn’t get finished, and he was left flapping goose-quills instead of an arm ?”

“ Yes, only they were swans, Effie.”

“ Your swans perhaps, but my geese. How do any of us know what any of us really are ?”

“ Not till the sifting comes,” Mary suggested.

But Lady Maitland went on without apparently noticing the remark : “ At any rate, I know who’ll be left flapping goose quills to the end of the chapter—and that’s Miss Mysie Cuningham.”

“ But, Effie, I believe she is one of the people who’ll be able to help—if only you’ll take her the right way.”

“ Not that horrid, self-sufficient little prig, Mary. What good could she possibly be—unless as an irritant !”

“ Even irritants have their uses ! Besides, she is much esteemed in what she would describe as her own circle, and is really a very capable young woman. She would make an excellent Secretary for the S. and S.F.A., for instance.”

“ In her own opinion, I’ve no doubt.”

“ Now Effie, what do you know about her ?”

“ Only that Harry made me call years ago when

old Cuninghame was Provost or something. He said it would be of use if I did. Then, when the old fellow died, I felt sorry for the wife, poor thing; and, as the girl was much the same age, asked her up to tea with the children. The only result of which is that she will call them all—even Ronny and Jim—by their christian names still; and is absolutely insufferable when any of us happen to meet her. Its not what you call encouraging—now is it, Mary?”

Mrs. Patrick smiled. Then sighed. For that face with the sparkle of humour peeping, as it were, from behind its unwonted mask of tragedy, was comical even while pathetic. Mary was acutely conscious of both tragedy and comedy; foreseeing—as who does not—what might, indeed what inevitably must, be in store not only for Effie Maitland but for all the other bright irresponsible women of whom she is a type.

Lady Maitland divined, and took some credit to herself for averting, the vein of seriousness into which she considered Mrs. Patrick—on account no doubt of her delicate health—is so prone to fall.

“Come on with your horrible list of duties,” she urged, “I’m sure we aren’t nearly through with them yet.”

The discussion—for it was many sided—took time. It touched on societies already established requiring readjustment, and schemes that must be organised and started.

Many requirements had been thought of by Mrs. Patrick and plans for their organisation worked out. But it was essential to their success that Lady

Maitland's interest in them should be aroused and her dislike to the idea of "mixing up" with people not of her "own sort" combated and overcome. All this required no small amount of tact and diplomacy. Could it, Mrs. Patrick wondered, even while energetically advocating it, ever be a success? The barriers on either side were so strong, so substantially cemented by custom, that, to one who had friends in both camps and realised the prejudices of each, the hope of amalgamation seemed slight. Yet unity is strength, she told herself, and there is little strength to be attained without it. So she persevered bravely in face of much difficulty and very possible defeat.

"Then you will call on old Miss Rankin?" was Mrs. Patrick's final appeal to Lady Maitland, who, biting the end of her pencil with an anxious frown, sat surrounded with scraps of scribbled paper, "and let me ask the newly baroneted Cleggs to tea tomorrow: so that you can meet quite casually and avoid the awkwardness of calling on them all of a sudden. . . And you will be your own sweet self, Effie,—won't you?. . . And not make awful faces as you're doing just now," she added persuasively.

"I won't promise."

Yet there seemed a soft tremor in her voice and—surely—an unwonted mistiness in her eyes as she stooped to kiss Mrs. Patrick, through whose mind a sudden hope flitted.

And passed. . . As, straightening herself with startling energy, Effie exclaimed: "Damn Germany. Why couldn't they let us alone!"

And was gone.

CHAPTER III.

EXTRACT FROM MYSIE CUNINGHAM'S DIARY.

I think it would be a good plan, and might be of interest in the future, if I were to keep a Diary during War Time.

At first, I must confess, it did not occur to me that the War would make any great difference to us—here, in Geesekirk. But, now that I am able to realise how universal the influence will be, I feel I ought to set down my Personal Impressions.

I have never before attempted to write anything beyond ordinary epistolary correspondence—and, of course, school compositions. But, as I was thoroughly grounded in grammar, and took second prize for literature the year I was at boarding school in Glasgow, I anticipate no difficulty in writing in good style : though laying no claim to be erudite.

Fortunately I still have “Soule's Dictionary of Synonyms”—which we always used at the literature classes at Miss Gillespie's—to refer to, should I ever feel at a loss. Punctuation has never been the difficulty to me it is to some; and, in any case, I intend to aim at being perfectly spontaneous and natural; while carefully avoiding, as our literature teacher always warned us to do, the tendency of the present day to inelegant expressions. (I do not like the word “slang” and consider Soule's substitute singularly well chosen). Indeed I am studying some of dear Papa's “Standard Authors”

for the express purpose of forming my style on the old-fashioned rather than the new.

After this slight preface, I think I may venture to make a commencement; entering my Impressions, quite methodically, as I find they affect me.

My first Impression would, then, be the tea-party at the Patricks, which took place the very week in which War was declared.

Mrs. Patrick is an invalid. She is not, I suppose, what is considered old; but, as her hair is white and she never moves off the sofa, one naturally thinks of her as old.

Mr. Patrick—his name is Patrick Patrick, which is most peculiar, and she calls him “Pat”—is old. Lady Maitland says—(I had better mention here that I intend to quote other people’s opinions as much as I consider judicious in my Diary, as I do not think it sounds nice for those as young as myself to insist too much on their own views, even when they may be of more value. At the same time I shall not, of course, allow myself to appear a cypher.) Lady Maitland, then, says: that Mr. Patrick—he is a great favourite of hers—will never be old. For, she declares, “he is one of those whose perpetual mental vitality keeps them perennially young.” And, as he likes to quote himself: “Those whom the gods love die young,” (which means they remain young till they die); “and so,” he goes on, in the way that I do not always think either amusing or in very good taste, “I’ll never be more than nineteen.”

And really, as dear Mamma says, from the flow of his spirits he might be a school-boy. Yet I must

admit—for I intend to endeavour to be quite unbiassed—that if anyone in Geesekirk wants advice in everyday matters they always seem to go to Mr. Patrick; or if it is any sorrow—or sort of Sunday thing—to her. Mamma and I never would, of course, for we are not like most; but able to depend completely on ourselves; and would never think of discussing our private affairs with anyone, least of all with Mr. Patrick. (For which I have a reason, that I am going to mention presently.) Yet many do. I have often wondered why.

It is, I suppose, because of this curious tendency among the majority that everyone went to discuss the topic of the day at the Patricks.

Mr. Patrick was in the Navy, and that may possibly be why he has a peculiar foreign way of pronouncing the letter R. Mrs. Wilsone-Browne says sailors pick up many queer little tricks, and as she has a brother in the Marines she ought to know. However, I have my own ideas, and very well-founded ones too, on that subject. Some say that Mr. Patrick left the Service on account of his wife's health; but when I asked if that was so he took me up so short that I felt convinced there must be some other reason. Probably one not to his credit, as dear Mamma shrewdly surmised when I told her. And we agreed then—it is some time ago now—not to say anything, but to be very careful not to be drawn into any intimacy out of which it might be awkward to withdraw if anything unpleasant ever came to light. It would be dreadful for the Maitlands if it ever did; for they are very intimate. I have always been on my guard so as not to be

drawn into any situation that might prove embarrassing—though, of course, I go to their house; as if I did not it would certainly cause remark.

I generally go to parties with Mrs. MacCulloch, our good Minister's wife, or Adeline Wilsone-Browne, who is my great friend and confidant. Her husband—he is much older than she—is the Doctor. So that either of them are quite unexceptionable chaperones. Mamma, of course, has never gone out at all since dear Papa was taken. But on this occasion as the party—if indeed it could be called a party when we were all in our ordinary summer frocks—was quite informal, I went alone.

Miss Rankin, who, on account of her great age, hardly ever goes anywhere now, was there, “for,” she declared, it was “an epoch making event.” I heard her myself say so to Mr. Patrick as she came in. And he answered: “Yes indeed, this is going to change all our standards of values.”

I understood very well to what her remark referred; but I am still at a loss to account for his. Could it have been a reference to the way the price of everything has gone up so that Mamma and I have decided we shall have to forbid the servants butter, and put them on a half allowance of tea? Or is it the issue of paper notes, which we hear spoken of as possible? Or had it some other meaning?

.Of course we were all very much upset at the thought of War, but when the sun is shining, as I very well remember it was that day, and one has on a nice fresh muslin frock (Mamma said I had better put on my new one, as there might not be

another opportunity, and as it turned out I was very glad I did) and everything is looking just as usual, it is difficult to realise there is any difference.

When I entered the Patrick's tiny drawing-room it was already full to overflowing, and I was surprised to see not only Alison and Bethia, whom I have met there once or twice (to be quite correct it is three times), but Lady Maitland herself, who, to my certain knowledge, has never before honored Mrs. Patrick by being present at one of her informal tea-parties. We all know she often drops in to see her, just as she would to see any one else on the estate who is an invalid—for no one can deny Lady Maitland has a kind heart—but we have always thought it strange—indeed I might almost say marked—that, in spite of their supposed intimacy, Lady Maitland has never been present at any of Mrs. Patrick's social gatherings. This naturally connected itself at once in my mind with Miss Rankin's remark about this being an “epoch-making event”: for it was certainly a very great event to the Patricks Lady Maitland—and, indeed, as it afterwards turned out, the whole Maitland family—having come to tea with them.

Mr. Patrick was bustling about getting chairs for everybody, and exclaiming, in the loud voice that Miss Rankin calls “breezy” and professes to like, that he wondered why “Sookie,” as he will call the little maid-of-all-work Susan, did not bring in the tea. It must be very unpleasant to have only one servant, and I do think on such an occasion they ought to have had someone in.

“I know it's all there,” he kept saying to each

one in turn, "for I was in Geesekirk on my bike this morning and commandeered all the cakes at Goudie's. Commandeered the word, you know now, Miss Mysie. Ah! There she comes with our rations. Rash of us to expect any—eh? . . . Here, Sookie, I'll take that tray. You cut away and fetch the hot stuff. There's dropped scones and short-bread and cookies—all my own pets, in fact. Always secure your own pets, that's my motto, eh, Miss Alison? Then whoever's nose is out of joint it won't be yours."

While this bombardment (how quickly one picks up military phraseology) of words was going on, I noticed Lady Maitland was leaning over Mrs. Patrick's sofa and they were holding hands. So I thought I would go up and ask if anything was the matter. But Mr. Patrick quite took possession of me, in that overpowering way he has, and when, at last, I insisted with him that I must go and have a little chat with my hostess, Lady Maitland was smiling just as usual and saying, "Yes, they'll both be in presently, and Harry too. But of course they've got a lot to do before they go, and so we came on first."

She moved away then, shaking hands with me most cordially as she went past. So, naturally, I turned to Mrs. Patrick and asked, "Who is it that is going?"

For a moment she did not answer. And there was certainly a very odd look in her eyes as they followed Lady Maitland across the room. Even at the time it struck me as peculiar, and I wondered what it meant.

“Not Ronny and Jim?” I inquired, for in this crisis one’s thoughts at once fly to the Military.

She nodded. Then went on with a sort of gulp, as if she were swallowing a lozenge—(and indeed it has sometimes occurred to me to conjecture that possibly Mrs. Patrick takes drugs):

“Yes, both her boys are going back to their regiments to-morrow. They are ordered to Aldershot, and are in great hopes that means going at once to the Front.”

It seems peculiar that ordinary words should have such an effect, but I certainly felt the sensation so often described in books—as if pierced to the heart by the stab of some sharp pointed instrument—quite a lump rose in my throat, and I felt as if tears might spring to my eyes. It was a most peculiar sensation.

“Oh, poor Lady Maitland!” I cried, “I must go at once and tell her how sorry I am for her.”

But I did not, for Mrs. Patrick—sinking back among her cushions in the languid way that I must allow (for I trust I am always fair and unbiassed in my judgments) does look most interesting—whispered, as if it was a great effort to her to speak at all, “No, don’t, dear.”

On thinking it over I cannot imagine why I yielded to her, instead of acting on my own impulse and going up and offering my condolences, which would undoubtedly have been the right thing to do. As it was, I never managed to speak to Lady Maitland the whole afternoon, and feel sure she must have felt the omission and considered me deficient in sympathy. But it certainly was not my

fault. Someone—either Mr. Patrick, or Bethia or Miss Rankin—was always coming up just as I saw my opportunity. It was all the more unfortunate as I was unable in consequence to give dear Mamma many little details with which she naturally counts on me to supply her when I get home. I often think I am too easily influenced by others, considering what a sound judgment I have—inherited no doubt from dear Papa, who was so much looked up to in the Borough. I am aware that diffidence is not altogether a fault in the young, and I am not yet—but I think it better not to name my age, as this Diary will be read in years to come when I might not care for an inference to be drawn. Nevertheless, I have determined to rely on myself for the future, and not be influenced by those whose opinions are not likely to be as judicious as my own.

But to return to our muttons, as we girls used to say at Miss Gillespie's (where I would have got a prize for French had not Nora Muir been given it instead of me). We had tea and, before it was over, in came Ron and Jim in the highest of spirits. I was wondering at them and thinking I would say something to show that I, at any rate, understood the gravity—I daresay I might almost say tragedy—of the situation, when Mr. Patrick called out in his loud boisterous way: "Now then, we're all going to drink to the health of the boys we're so proud of . . . and the Mother we are all envying to-day."

And, all in a moment, everyone had champagne in their glasses—I cannot think how it was arranged

so quickly—and Ronny Maitland was making a speech. Such an absurd speech as it was too; for he and Mr. Patrick sort of made it together. It was most peculiar. As if they were playing at some absurd kind of game and helping each other.

B. Maitland—that is, of course, Bethia, whom her intimates call by her initial alone—seemed to join in, as she stood by Mrs. Patrick's sofa, and once I saw Mrs. Patrick nod at her and smile as if they had some private understanding. And Alison said to Mrs. MacCulloch—for I happened to be near and overheard her—"Mr. Patrick is almost overdoing it I am afraid, and has quite infected Ron. Poor Mother, I hope she won't think it unfeeling. She has been crying all morning."

I could not catch what Mrs. MacCulloch answered, as she spoke very low and huskily. Evidently she had a cold, for she blew her nose louder than is nice in a drawing-room. But then Mrs. MacCulloch cannot be called very refined. Then I glanced over to Lady Maitland, who did not look a bit like crying. Indeed her eyes shone, and there was a look in her face as if she was what the French call exalted. Not at all sad. But I daresay that was the effect of the champagne.

It was just then I noticed Sir Harry had arrived. He was standing rather outside the door, looking in, almost as if he did not want to be seen. And with such a strange expression on his face. If it were not absurd to think of such a thing in connection with a man, I would have said there were tears in his eyes. Then he suddenly saw Lady Maitland had noticed him and came forward quite

smiling, and was soon talking and laughing with everybody. Sir Harry always is very genial. He chaffed his sons and cracked jokes with Mrs. Pat, as I noticed he called her, and teased some of the younger ladies; but was quite formal, I might almost say deferential, in his manner to me: showing that a real gentleman always knows with whom that sort of easy style would be admissible and with whom it would not. Very different from Mr. Patrick who, I must say, was, I consider, extremely rude.

It occurred when I was discussing the political situation with the Revd. Fergus MacCulloch and Dr. Wilsone-Browne so as to be able to take back as much information as possible to dear Mamma; who, not going out herself is, of course, dependant on me. I do not think they knew any more than we can read for ourselves in the papers, but it is a satisfaction to make sure of that; for Mamma has a great idea of a gentleman's opinion being of more value than a lady's: no doubt from associating with dear Papa. But he was quite an exception; and all gentlemen cannot be expected to have the knowledge and grasp of political life that he had. I am sure neither the Minister nor the Doctor can know much about politics, or, in their position in life, they would not be Conservatives. I would not be surprised, however, if the Maitlands, being such strong Tories, do not influence them. One can quite understand that it might. And I daresay, now I come to think of it, that is why Mr. Patrick is so violent against the Government.

I was just saying how splendid I had thought

Mr. Asquith's speech, and Mr. MacCulloch had replied: "Yes, it was a grand bit of rhetoric," when up came Mr. Patrick and interrupted with: "But, surely, Miss Cuninghame, you don't think the present Government is to be admired?"

"I don't require to think, Mr. Patrick," I answered, very dignified, "my principles are those of my dear Father."

He made the most peculiar face, almost as if he were going to whistle, and said: "Of course, . . . a chip of the old block. That accounts for everything."

Then, no doubt remarking my surprise that he should allude to dear Papa in such a manner, he added: "Dear me, dear me, I beg your pardon, I'm sure. That is quite the proper feminine attitude—and most refreshing now-a-days." Which showed he felt my set down, at any rate. Mr. MacCulloch had turned away, quite embarrassed, I could see, that Mr. Patrick should have so forgotten himself as to speak to me in such a manner. Naturally his alluding to dear Papa as an *old block* was what distressed me most, though to call me a *chip* was in extremely bad taste, and I felt it very much.

It was just then that our new Baronet, Sir Thomas Clegg, came up to ask after Mamma, and made a break for which I was not sorry.

It was quite a surprise to see the Cleggs at this gathering, for I feel sure they had no previous acquaintance with the Maitlands. Yet I saw Lady Maitland conversing most affably with Lady Clegg. No doubt their having a title too, now, is the

reason of the change. But I must say I wonder at Lady Maitland, for poor Mrs.—I mean Lady—Clegg is not at all refined.

Sir Thomas is much more the gentleman than she is the lady—in spite of her grand Paris dresses—and the son makes no appearance at all. But he was not present.

Another thing I think I should mention is what I overheard Miss Rankin say to Mrs. Patrick, and for which Mr. Patrick thanked her as if she had said something clever, whereas it was very silly indeed.

It was quite at the end when they were saying good-bye. Unfortunately I was not near enough to catch the commencement of the conversation, but Miss Rankin's strong voice, with its terrible accent, was very clear, so I know I cannot be mistaken.

“Never you mind, Mary,” (I had never been certain before that Miss Rankin really did call Mrs. Patrick by her first name, and was glad of the opportunity of ascertaining it), “Never you mind, Mary, there's little use in wurrds” (I spell it according to her pronunciation), “they never got anyone much further. . it's the being it that matters.” And you would have thought from the way Mrs. Patrick looked at her that she was grateful to the poor old lady. But what was there to be grateful for? It is absurd to say words don't matter when of course they matter more than anything else; for how could one person know what the other was thinking unless they spoke about it? And it cannot really matter much what anyone is as long as they don't say. Very likely Miss Rankin may be

getting a little foolish as she is so old. People frequently do, I believe. And of course Mrs. Patrick would feel obliged in her own house to seem pleased, however foolish she thought her.

But it is a remarkable thing for Miss Rankin to have said, for if she never spoke people might think her kind and good-natured, whereas with her sharp tongue they know she is not.

It was about 6,30 when everyone began to go. The Maitlands made the move, of course; but did not leave at once, as they had, it appeared, some arrangements to make about Red Cross, of which Mr. Patrick is, I discovered, the County Director, as they call it; and Bethia a Commandant. Also Lady Maitland asked several to join the work-parties she intends inaugurating, and I agreed to do so.

I think I ought to mention—though no one dislikes bringing themselves forward more than I do—that as I was making my way to the door, Lady Maitland herself called me back to ask if I “would be so very kind” (I put her exact words in inverted commas) as to be Secretary of the Soldiers and Sailors’ Families Association. I admit I hesitated—not that I have any doubt as to my capacity, but because I wondered whether the work would be very congenial. But when she went on to say she feared it might entail more work than I was able for, explaining that she would herself be President and do all she could to assist me, I at once said that we must all do our best at this critical time and that I was confident I could undertake whatever was required. She thanked me very cordially, saying

something about feeling sure that was the "right spirit," adding that we would meet at Mrs. Patrick's and that she would send me a notice as to hour, etc. in a day or two. If I had known it was to be at Heatherknowe I am not sure that I would have agreed, but I hope to persuade her how much better, and more suitable, it would be to have such Meetings at her own house.

While we were talking I noticed how peculiar Mrs. Patrick looked and feel sure she was vexed at seeing Lady Maitland and myself in such intimate talk, and making all arrangements, without any reference to her, in her own house and at her own party; for she lay back looking very white, with her lips pursed tight together. But no one took any notice. Indeed they all seemed very cheerful and busy, and it was not till I got home, and had had time to think it over, and tell Mamma all about it, that we agreed it was certainly peculiar of the Patricks to have had a party like that; and very trying for poor Lady Maitland. Though I must say she did not seem affected by it.

But then one knows some people have not very deep feelings, and do not take things to heart as others do.

CHAPTER IV.

Miss Rankin was sitting in her parlour, as she calls it, enjoying the warmth of the lovely August day by dozing intermittently in an atmosphere that precluded all possibility of gauging either the temperature or the time of the year with any accuracy. Many things in Miss Rankin's modest establishment are still conducted on the exact lines on which, as she likes to tell you, "they always were in my Father's time." That is when her home had been one of those charming old-fashioned houses in Moray Place, overlooking the Dean Gardens. It had been an article of faith there to shut the windows and keep down the blinds in summer, "for fear of flies, and to save the furniture." And Miss Rankin adhered unflinchingly to the rule.

In those days Mr. Adam Rankin had been a prosperous Writer to the Signet, and a well-known figure in Edinburgh, where his daughter had enjoyed social advantages the like of which no longer exist, so I am told, in that or any other capital in the world. Subsequently, on his enforced retirement through ill-health, she had brought her much-loved and honoured father to pass the remaining years of his life in the "country-side" that had been his boyhood's paradise. And there he dragged them out in what had appeared to his daughter to be exile—isolation—social oblivion.

And that not of necessity ; but as she in her sore heart, with natural enough bitterness, expressed it, “ malice prepense, wilfully and sinfully.”

True their means were now very limited ; but the Rankins were not of those who consider social advantages a commercial commodity. And very well Miss Rankin knew that had young Lady Maitland chosen to extend the hand of friendship to the daughter of the man who, as well as his “ forebears,” had always been a strong bulwark of the House of Maitland, her position in Geesekirk and Kildree would have been very different. And not only, or even chiefly, on that account was her heart sore, but the last years of her father’s life would have been warmed by the congenial mental sunshine to which he was accustomed, and which he sorely missed. As it was, though Sir Harry, mindful of traditions, did come to see his—or rather his father’s—former man of affairs from time to time, Lady Maitland had failed to do so ; except on one well-remembered occasion, when the young bride had been taken by her husband to make a round of calls on all the tenantry, and the Rankins had been included. Consequently intercourse had gradually dwindled, and, since Mr. Rankin’s death, had practically ceased. Hence the abiding bitterness rankling in a heart naturally warm, kindly and generous, beneath a somewhat harsh and seemingly austere appearance.

Had it not been for the advent of the Patricks, and the influence their genial, and almost universal friendliness diffused around them, that bitterness would ere now have completely overcome any in-

herited affection for the Maitland family; but unconsciously, though none the less insidiously, there had been instilled into the old lady, who was curiously susceptible in spite of her strong—at times overpowering—personality, a partial comprehension of, and therefore a more lenient judgment regarding the failings of those she was, in her inmost heart, only too ready to set up as idols and worship ungrudgingly.

After this preamble, the sensation created will be to some extent understood when Janet, the elderly maid of all work, suddenly burst into her Mistress's stuffy seclusion with the information, flung at her as though it had been a bomb, that: "Leddy Maitland's comin' up the front, mem."

"Leddy Maitland!" Miss Rankin, though calm, was alert in a moment; and, straightening her cap instinctively, replied: "Ask her in, Janet."

"Me ask her in! Like this. It wouldna be decent."

"Dearie me,—to be sure—yes,—I forgot it was washing day."

And certainly Janet's appearance, with sleeves rolled up to display red and brawny arms, a flushed face, scanty locks—dishevelled under a cap well awry—and stout proportions exaggerated by the huge sacking apron that enveloped them, was no fitting guise in which to meet and usher in a visitor.

"I'll open the door myself," was the mistress's prompt decision. "Perhaps ye might jist draw up that blind a wee bittie,—an' open a chink o' the window, to let in a gliff o' fresh air. Be careful

now, Janet; let the blind set over the chink, on account of the flies, ye know."

"Hoots! A ken weel aboot the flees," responded Janet, brusquely; for it would be upsetting to the most even tempered of us to be disturbed at the wash tub to open the door to a "leddyship"—and her best friend, or her worse enemy, could not truthfully accuse Janet of being good tempered—"could she no hae chosen s'mither day, an' no picket a Monday, when aw body's aye thrang wi' wurk? Ye're no ower braw yerself, neethers, mem. It's a peety but what ye had the time to get into yer silk."

"Havers, Janet,—Can ye not settle yon blind?"

"Tit! Whatever's taken it! Its aye cumsteery, but ye'd think the day it wuz ettlin to make ye sweer! An' there's that bell ding-dingin' through the hoose—an' me no there—an' her Leddyship nae doot thinkin' on aw the gran' flunkies *she'll* aye hae rinnin' at the verra furst tinkle!"

"Now, Janet," interposed her mistress, soothingly, "there's nothing to make a to-do about. Ye'd think to hear ye that the Germans was at the door."

"Germans! A'd think naethin' o'a when Germans! But for her Leddyship to be kept waitin'—Sakes alive, it fair moithers me."

"Well, it's nobbuddy but yourself that's keeping her waiting now. If ye'll get out o' here I'll soon see after her Leddyship."

Growling and grumbling like thunder dying away in the distance, Janet's voice was heard, as

she retreated through the kitchen to the wash-house beyond.

“How do you do, Leddy Maitland; I *am* at home, as you see. Can I do anything for you? . . . Will you not come in?”

“How do you do. . . Yes, may I come in?”

And Lady Maitland, feeling, truth to tell, shy as she had never done, even in the presence of Royalty itself, walked into the little room—now enlivened by a shaft of sunlight, and relieved by a breath of air—and took in at a glance the old-world charm of her surroundings. They were varied, it is true; for a coloured shell atrocity, under a glass case, was set out on a Queen Anne cabinet, an anti-macassar in crocheted silk disfigured a lovely Hepplewhite chair, while gilt brackets “upholstered in plush” supported priceless specimens of Spode and Wedgwood side by side with the most glaringly impossible cats and dogs in Minton’s worst Victorian style.

Nevertheless the effect as a whole was attractive, and Lady Maitland’s “What a charming room,” quite genuine.

“You’ll remember it?” interrogated Miss Rankin, with truly Scottish mingling of question and assertion.

“No, not very distinctly,” Lady Maitland admitted, searching anxiously in the dimness of past memories.

“No, it’s twenty year and more since you were here.”

And Effie Maitland found herself precipitately brought, face to face, with what Mrs. Patrick had

hinted at, and she had lightly discounted; but now became aware had, for Miss Rankin, a very real and definite existence.

As this knowledge came to her, she saw in a flash—for she is a person of quick intuitions, and ready sympathies—the sorry part she had played. And felt, with the sensations of a child whose air-balloon has been pricked, the collapse of her habitual self-confidence before the soul-searching glance of this plain, hard-featured old lady; who stood with unassumed and unassuming dignity waiting for her unexpected—and uninvited—visitor to make known the motive of her coming.

“Will you not sit down, Leddy Maitland?”

But the tone of the invitation had so little cordiality that Lady Maitland continued to stand.

“I . . . It’s very kind of you to allow me to come and see you,” she said feebly.

“The kindness—if kindness it be,” was the uncompromising answer, “cannot compare wi’ yer leddyship’s condescension in coming.”

“Of course, I . . . I ought to have come to call before, but. . .” Lady Maitland hesitated, her cheeks flushing painfully.

“Far be it from me to cast that up to yer ladyship. There’s surely no ‘ought’ in the matter. It being purely a question o’ gude will.”

Miss Rankin’s voice was deep, with a strong accent of which, even in her youthful Edinburgh days, she had always been proud. The provincial life of later years had by no means lessened it; while constant and intimate association with her maid, Janet, had added to her vocabulary many

words and expressions not generally found now, except among the country folk in remote districts. And even there they are rapidly becoming obsolete. At that moment the somewhat harsh intonation sounded to her visitor ominous as the first mutterings of a storm. It took her all her moral courage—a quality she was not much in the habit of cultivating—to sustain the new-born resolutions that, on the door-step, had been so jauntily robust and were, she now suddenly discovered, collapsing like a house of cards. But Mary Patrick's earnest face rose before her, and the echo of Mary's voice saying : “ *Do*, Effie, have done with all that horrid, nonsensical affectation—for in you it is nothing else—of pretending there is no such thing as duty or responsibility or the ‘noblesse oblige’ feeling that would do more to stop socialism and all that sort of rubbish than any amount of empty talk—and be your own sweet self; even if it does mean—as it will, you know, darling—a real effort, sometimes.”

So, making the effort, she stood her ground and said :

“ Miss Rankin, I have come to you for advice.”

“ You ! Lady Maitland. . . to me ! ”

“ Yes indeed—Ah, don't look so astonished. It should not be so astonishing, all things considered. And that you should feel it so makes me . . . ashamed.”

“ My dear—I mean—I beg your pardon, my leddy. . . ”

“ No. . please. . don't do that. It is I who am the suppliant—coming to you to ask you to be so very, very kind as to help and advise me. . . ”

“ But, Lady Maitland, I do not understand. . . ”

“ No, nor do I. That is why I have come here to ask you to help me, for it seems to me like this : I know one bit of the puzzle, you the other ; and, I think, if we were to put our knowledge together, we would be able to manage the thing so it would fit right.”

“ You’re jist a par-r-rable, my leddy.”

Lady Maitland laughed.

“ I wish I felt sure I was anything so useful ! ”

Miss Rankin eyed her thoughtfully ; as her own grey parrot might have eyed some foreign substance thrust suddenly within the bars of his cage. There was a whole world of wisdom—both intuitional and acquired—in that poignant gaze.

Her words, when at length they came, had the augmented burr and increase of the pungent accent that is characteristic of the Scotch woman of her time and kind in moments of strong emotion.

“ Ye’re per-r-rfectly capable of being as useful and as sensible as anyone I could lay my hand on, Lady Maitland, . . . So be ye choose to be.”

“ Then please lay your hand on me.”

The way in which Effie Maitland said the words and the gesture that accompanied them were irresistible. A slow smile lit the furrowed lines of Miss Rankin’s harshly featured face.

“ Ye’re no blate ! ” she exclaimed, with involuntary reversion to a quaint idiom of her mother tongue, “ An’ I can verra well see that I’ll jist be like the rest o’ them, and give in to yer whimsies. Even if mebbe I canna’ approve o’ them. For there’s many a time, Leddy Maitland, when I have not approved.”

“Why didn’t you say so?”

“*Me* say so! What d’ye take me for? A bletherin’ auld fule, I’m thinkin’! But if ye want my advice, an’ come here seeking it—weel, ye may take yer Davy ye’ll get it. That I can assure ye, my Leddy.”

“Yes, that is exactly what I *do* want.”

Her voice was firm and decided; yet, inwardly, Effie Maitland’s heart quailed before this uncompromising old Scotch woman, now that she had, with her own hands, thrown down the barriers that custom had built up between them. And, once more, the impulse was strong upon her to turn and flee. But she stood her ground, firm and smiling.

“Ye’ve got grit,” Miss Rankin remarked, with a nod that made the bunch of weird unlikely flowers and grasses in her cap quake and quiver, “and plenty o’ spunk, as *we* call it. But won’t ye set down?”

“Thank you,” Lady Maitland seated herself then; and, for the first time since her entrance, the clear blue eyes met, fully and frankly, those of her hostess. For instinctively she felt that this second invitation to sit down was tantamount to an expression of friendliness.

“But why ‘*we*,’ Miss Rankin? I am Scotch too and understand my native tongue as well as you.”

“Are ye? Yes, so ye are. I’m not denying it. But there’s Scotch and Scotch, and me and you. And we’re jist as deeferent and as far apairt as—well,—as our late gracious Queen Victoria, God rest Her, from yon Militant hizzies they make such

a talk about. . I could not put us further, now could I?"

"No, indeed you could not! But need you have put us quite so far? And surely you don't want to compare me to a Suffragette?"

"Well, ye're mebbe no further from them than me from Her Gracious Majesty. Besides, I never said which was which—did I? It might jist as well by myself I was evening to be like a Suffragette."

The gravity with which she spoke, combined with the wry twist of her mouth—as if she had thought of a joke while eating a sour plum—was so comical that Lady Maitland burst into hearty laughter, in which Miss Rankin joined as heartily. Drawn appreciably closer together by it, they went on with the business in hand.

"You see," Lady Maitland explained, "there are all the people who live in those grand, new villas along the Loch. I have never known..."

"Ye never wanted to know..." interrupted Miss Rankin.

"No, that's quite true," agreed Effie meekly, "I have never wanted to know these...these..."

"Merchant Princes," suggested Miss Rankin, "nor, I wouldna' wonder, the smaller fry that try to make out they're the same size."

"No, indeed, I never realised there was much difference in size."

"Oh, but there is. . In their own estimation, any way! But how are ye going to begin, my Leddy?"

"That's just it. How *am* I going to begin? Of course I know all our own people on the estate—the Colts and the Murrays and the Binnies, and so on.

And a few outside, like the Campbells and Mrs. Baird; and, of course, Dr. and Mrs. Wilsone-Browne and Mrs. Cuninghame and Mysie. . . .”

Miss Rankin snorted.

No other word can attempt to indicate the sound emitted from between her screwed lips: and that does not by any means do it justice.

“There’s a pair o’ them,” she pronounced; “the Mother’s a poor useless body—rolled round and round wi’ yairds and yairds of crapes and bombazines. How could she not make an effort to win out and take order wi’ that gurl of her’s?”

“Mrs. Patrick thinks the girl will be of use.”

“Mistress Patrick’s too generous minded to be fit to understand yon self-suffeicient eediot. But even Mistress Patrick ’ll find it’s ill makin’ a silk purse out o’ a sow’s ear.”

“Then there’s the Minister and Mrs. MacCulloch,” continued Lady Maitland, striving to lengthen out her list, “and . . .”

“And me,” added Miss Rankin.

“No, not you. You are quite separate and unique. A . . .”

“A sort of pelican in the wilderness, I’m thinkin’—or, mebbe the scape-goat that’s got to take on its shoulders all the quirks and cranks o’ the whole clanjamfrey; and whummle them along some-way. Well, I suppose I’ll have jist to take up my burden and dree my weird. Any o’ them that I am acquainted with I’ll be glad to ask to do whatever you wish, my Leddy.”

“It’s awfully good of you.”

“Bless us and save us! What’s gude about it?”

And whaten a way for a Maitland to be speakin' to a Rankin! Is it not a tradeetion in our family (and let me tell ye, Leddy Maitland, that though ye *are* an Ogilvy, it's as auld as yer ain) that we have been the liege vassals jist as they have been the liege lords for generations and generations. In later years we have managed their business for them, but in earlier times,—when fighting was the only business,—we were their right hand too. And if it were na' that Providence, in His unsearchable wisdom (which I'll admit I've whiles been so far left to myself as to misdoubt) saw fit to make me a woman, I'd have been Sir Harry's man of business myself; or more like it would ha' bin my son, or mebbe by now even my grandson. But here I am haverin' when I s'ud be takin' my orders from yer Leddyship. What is it exactly that ye're wantin' of me?"

"I want to know everyone in Geesekirk and Kildree."

"I wish ye joy o' them! Why ye'd niver have anither peaceful moment on this airth gin ye did that."

"Wouldn't I? Why not? Mrs. Patrick says they are all right."

"Mistress Patrick's one o' them sugared ones that sweetens everything she touches. No, no, don't you take for Gospel all Mistress Patrick tells ye. There's some that's gude an' some that's bad; an'a hantle that's meddy-ocker. But we 'munna compleen,' as old James, who was gardener to my gran'father used to say, "for the Lord God created them all"—an' as everyone knows, it taks all

sorts to make a wurld. Ay, and you may be sure you'll find samples of all these sorts both in Geese-kirk and Kildree. No, Leddy Maitland, I would not advise your making their acquaintance."

"Why not? Besides, I have made up my mind not to mind anything. What does it matter whether I like it or not?"

"Yes, yes, its fine and easy to say that. But ye're bound to mind. Ye're not fit to make yerself like some o' them. Like them, indeed! Ye jist couldna' abide them. There's thoughts an' devices among them that's so despicable, an' at the same time they're so puffed with conceit o' themselves, that jist to hear tell o' them's fit to turn yer gizzard green."

"Goodness!"

"Aye, Goodness, indeed. I tell ye there's some o' them upstart villa folk I would not know myself. No doubt they'd uphold it's them wouldna' know me; but give me the chance an' I'll let them see which way it is, so I will."

"And it's that very chance I am wanting to give you, Miss Rankin. Only its the chance to know—not *not* to know. Don't you see I'm asking you to do the very thing I'm hating to do myself. . For that's just how you are going to help me. You see doing it together won't be half so bad, will it? And Sir Harry says if I am to be any good at all it's by getting everyone—every blessed one, he said—to join. So that I have come to ask you not only to introduce me to the people you *do* know, but to help me to get to know the ones you *don't* know—and don't want to know."

“ I couldn’t do it, Lady Maitland.”

The rugged face looked as hard and stern as the hills it so quaintly resembled.

“ Couldn’t you? Not for my sake, so much, but because of Sir Harry, and the old tradition that has existed all these years and years between his family and yours . . . and because he wants us to.”

“ Ye’d win a bur-rd off a tree, so ye would, with that lurin’ voice o’ your’s, nae doot; but I’m an auld bur-rd, an’ its no so easy lurin’ me. No, no, many’s the time I’ve declared I would never mix wi’ yon upstarts, that come stramashin’ over from Glasgow, with their motors and motor-cycles and all their expensive trash; and settin’ down their great heedious factories on the very banks o’ our bonnie Loch, ‘filin’ its pure waters with their money-grubbing filth. And then making to themselves pa-a-lacies alongside, an’ thinkin’ they’re the cream o’ a wur-rld that they’ve made as deeferent from what the Almighty intended it to be as yon Margareen, they mak’ sich a clash about, is deeferent from the sweet-churned butter my Mother’s Mother aye made wi’ her own hands. However,” abruptly checking her stream of words, not because they had come to an end, but as though she had suddenly decided to turn off the tap, “ However, why should I deeve yer Laddyship with all that. The first and last of it is, sorry as I am, to refuse a Maitland, that’s a thing I could not do. No, neether for him, nor you, nor any one.”

The silence that ensued was broken by the discordant scream of a parrot, sounding to Effie Mait-

land malignant as it harshly overwhelmed the soothing hum of bees among the flowers in the sunny garden. Was it typical of adverse forces triumphing over her? For a moment it seemed so; then, with a supreme effort, she once more returned to the charge. “Couldn’t you?”

And now it was Miss Rankin’s turn to feel the foundations of her determination totter; as, at the first sound of that soft voice pleading once more, there flashed through her mind the thought of the walls of Jericho collapsing utterly at the mere blast of a trumpet. But her face was still set like a flint.

“Couldn’t you?” the voice persisted. “But don’t you think we women, who cannot go and fight the Germans, have something else to do that is just as much for our country? Perhaps ours is quite as important a part of the struggle, really and truly. Mrs. Patrick thinks so, and I am beginning to see what she means. . . . For I do feel I have been going quite in the wrong direction, somehow. I don’t know how it is, but . . .” She paused, her voice quivering with the strain it was to her to break through the reticence with which we all so carefully protect our inner selves; and Miss Rankin went on:

“I’m thinkin’ ye’ve been like the rest of us: mistaking the dross for the gold. And small blame to ye, if ye did; for, as you saw it, the dross had a wonderful glamour, I make no doubt.”

“Yes, perhaps that was it. Still I ought to have known—to have done better. I see that I ought. But what matters now is that we mustn’t think about ourselves, or what we like and want—or

dislike and don't want—any more. But, putting aside all silly prejudice, join together, all of us, hand in hand and heart to heart; so that we may help here, while *they* are fighting there. I—through my own fault, of course—from having, as you say, preferred the dross—am not able to be all the use I ought to be, here in Geesekirk and Kildree; but I thought, perhaps, I could be—if—if you were to help me. . . . So—won't you forgive and forget—and help me, . . . dear Miss Rankin?"

"Ay, will I, Leddy Maitland. . . . Mebbe I have just as much need as you to cast off the dross. An' anyway I thank you most sincerely for breakin' through the parteetions that keep us from knowing the best in each other—and more often than not make the most o' us mere eemages to one another—and speakin' straight to me as you have done. Well I know it wasna' easy to ye. And I honour ye for doin' it.—And now I'll jist say this and have done. . . . If I can help ye, in any way—pleasin' to me or not—every bit o' strength in this auld airm, and every drop of bluid in this auld hairt (an' there's a gie pickle o' both still I can promise ye) will be honoured by being used by you in the fur-rtherance of such an object. Here's my hand upon it, Leddy Maitland, . . . and . . . May God help us both."

Thus were the foundations laid of the staunch friendship that—to Geesekirk—was one of the most remarkable events of the War.

CHAPTER V.

Walking slowly homewards Lady Maitland was roused from not altogether pleasant meditations by a quick, firm footstep overtaking her.

“ Ah, is that you, Mr. Patrick ? ” she said, turning with a welcoming smile. “ I was just thinking of you—pondering sadly on my own idiotic blindness, and my gratitude to you and Mary for forcibly opening my eyes to behold Miss Rankin. . . . Imagine having lived ‘ cheek by jowl ’ all these years with such a treasure and been unable to discern it ! ”

“ Then the interview was a success ? ”

“ Yes, . . . I . . . I think so . . . after the first. ”

Her somewhat rueful smile and the tone of her voice told him more than the words.

“ Rather a stiff job, was it ? ”

“ Yes, she gave it me pretty straight. Not a bit more than, from her point of view, I deserved. And she put her point of view before me most firmly. . . . Dealt very faithfully with me, as she would say herself. Oh, why doesn’t every one do that with us ? . . . Why don’t other people tell us when we go barging about uselessly . . . or rushing off full steam ahead in the wrong direction ? ”

“ Would we like it very much, if they did ? ” inquired Mr. Patrick dryly. “ I think I see some of us being brought to book by some others, and how we’d resent it ! ”

“ Me, for instance.”

“ Yes, or myself.”

“ You wouldn’t mind if you felt it was true.”

“ Wouldn’t I? Why that’d only add fuel to my fury! . . . But everything depends, of course, on how a thing’s said . . . and who says it. I think I could stand a good deal of plain speaking from Miss Rankin, for instance. . . .”

“ Yes, . . . or Mary.”

“ Ah, Mary—bless her—is quite different. She doesn’t say things—she just does them and is them.”

“ Well, no one can accuse Miss Rankin of leaving it at that.”

“ I believe you, my lady.”

“ No, she was perfectly horrid at first; and then, when I was feeling very hot and sore and miserable inside—and on the point of putting out all prickles, like a hedgehog, she suddenly turned round and was . . . was . . . so . . . so”

Her voice abruptly broke; and, as abruptly, Mr. Patrick turned away to attack with his stick some harmless thistles growing by the road side. His onslaught could hardly have been more vigorous had they been Germans. And not till they were entirely demolished did he look up or answer.

“ Yes, Miss Rankin is priceless. Did you see Zedekiah,”

“ Zedekiah? No; who is he?”

“ The grey parrot. Zedekiah Rankin, as she calls him, is a most important member of the household—he, and old Janet, her maid.”

“ I didn’t see her either. You are coming up to

the House for a cup of tea?" she went on, for they arrived at the path that leads through the Glen to the House.

"Thanks, I should like to very much. I'm gey droothie."

Unlatching the gate they passed into the grounds along a path overshadowed by trees that grow—often with most precarious foothold—on either side of the steep rock-strewn banks of a huge cleft in the hills, at the bottom of which Maitland Water, that bonniest of burns, hurries over pebbles and among great masses of riven stone, tinkling and chuckling in a way that not only sounds cool and refreshing but is most soothing and friendly.

"Yes," Mr. Patrick went on. "Zedekiah, like his mistress, Adamina Rankin, is a character, and Janet, who declares herself 'fair deeved with the scraich of him,' no less so."

"What a find they all are. I am longing for A. and B. to know them."

"And there are lots of other "finds" I mean to make known to you. Some of whom I feel sure you will like and appreciate. Others. . ."

"Yes . . . others?"

"Well, there always are others. . . everywhere. . . Aren't there?"

"Mostly more of them. And that one has just to learn to deal with them and get the best out of them, is—I suppose—what you mean?"

"Yes, . . . And they with us."

"I suppose so. . . It's not going to be very easy. . . Is it?"

"No, it's not. But, as the Reverend Fergus told

us on Sunday, sympathy is the bond that has got to bring us all into touch so as to "achieve the world-wide co-operation that is to bring about a world peace." Talking of which, I want you to ask the Cleggs to luncheon and me to meet them—if you will. I am sure you will like her."

"Shall I? Then I'm not to take for gospel Miss Rankin's dictum that any new-fangled idea—or ideal—of amalgamating new Dicks and Toms with old Harrys is foredoomed to failure?"

"Miss Rankin. Good heavens, no! In that connection Miss Rankin is a petrification of old Toryism and as extinct as the Dodo. No, no, I've set my heart on your doing far better than that, my lady."

"But you're a Tory yourself—and so we all are."

"Yes, but thinking and moving ones, I trust—progressive, not fossils. And surely, surely, at a time like this we should none of us be Tories or Whigs or Radicals or Socialists (except in the milder ethical form), but true Unionists all. . . . elastic, give-and-take Unionists, united by the common bond of our common cause."

"What an idyll!"

"We must have idylls—and ideals," he retorted hotly, "and a definite aim and goal. You'll accomplish nothing without—or without the drastic measures sometimes necessary for their carrying through. My garden has taught me that, Ay, and my bonfire, that converts by its alchemy even the stiffest blue clay into soil of ideal fertility. And this war," he went on, his face alight with enthusiasm, "will teach us all that—and more. But first

we must learn to sink petty differences, meeting each other, wherever and whenever we can, kindly and sympathetic, even when we differ, like. . . like decent Christians. For these days are going to demand of us something more than our ordinary carelessness. . . our well-bred indifference. Called upon as we now are to fight for a principle and uphold it in the face of no matter what danger and suffering, we have a grand opportunity of giving ourselves, and our children, for an ideal so glorious as to be well worth dying for—if only we are worthy to die. . . And those of us who are not required to die have got to live it. . . And it's to you—you," he declared, and she felt as if a searchlight had been suddenly turned on her, "that I look to awaken Geesekirk to the realisation of the needs of our country and the new standards required of it."

"To me." She protested.

"Yes, to you, and such as you, Lady Maitland. And what's more," he went on, returning to the Mr. Patrick of everyday life, "once the plunge is made you will like it."

Before she could answer a turn in the path brought them in sight of the Bowling Green, where tea was laid under the big lime tree, and Bethia, two great deer-hounds circling round her in ecstasy, came flying hot-footed to meet them.

"Listen, . . listen. . ." she cried breathlessly, "ten thousand Russians are coming through, and . . ."

"Coming through? Russians? . . Coming through what?" asked her mother bewildered,

while Mr. Patrick, a twinkle in his eye, looked on smiling.

‘Oh Mummie, through here. . through Scotland, of course.’

“But what for?”

“To get to the Front. . Oh, don’t you see how splendid it is?”

“But where did they come from—and how?”

“They came from Russia. . . I suppose. . . by . . . by sea. Why Mr. Patrick, don’t you believe it?”

“Did you see them yourself, Miss B?” he asked.

“No, of course not. How could I when they didn’t come by Kildree? But Mrs. MacCulloch and Mrs. Wilsons-Browne told me it was perfectly true. By the way, Mother, they are coming up to talk about work parties. They began asking me all sorts of questions I couldn’t answer, so I thought the simplest plan was to ask them both up to tea, as I knew you would be in. You don’t mind, do you, Mum?”

“No, of course not, Childie. . And indeed here they come.”

“Now, listen, Mr. Patrick,” Bethia persisted, turning on him as her Mother crossed the lawn to meet her guests, “and you *must* believe. They were seen by the Station Master at—I’ve forgotten the name of the place—and by all sorts of porters and people. The trains came through, one after the other, all night, and the windows were white-washed so you couldn’t see in. . And. . ”

“How could anyone know who was in the carriages if they couldn’t see in?” questioned Alison,

who sat on the grass fanning herself with a huge bunch of horse-chestnut leaves. "Oh, bother these midges. How they worry."

"Now A., surely you're not going to join Mr. Patrick and be unbelieving," Bethia expostulated, "for isn't it true, Mrs. MacCulloch? Didn't Grant himself tell you so at the Station? Besides," as though finally clinching the argument, "it's so exciting it must be true."

"On the strength of such a decision I see nothing for it but to go and talk to Grant myself," laughed Mr. Patrick, putting down the big breakfastcup of tea he had just emptied, "so I'll be off."

"I'm sure he'll make you believe it," Bethia assured him, "Can't you just see them? . . Great bearded creatures, in outlandish uniforms, chattering a strange language. . . "

"With snow still on their fur-lined boots," chimed in Lady Maitland.

"And saying 'thankovitch' for thank you, I suppose?" added Mr. Patrick, as, still chuckling, he took his departure.

Discussion of the various local questions followed, and all went well until, apropos of arrangements for the working-parties, Lady Maitland remarked :

"And Miss Rankin, with whom I was talking things over this afternoon, is going to help me by asking everyone she knows to come."

Mrs. Wilsons-Browne stiffened perceptibly; and poor Mrs. MacCulloch, perceiving it, grew hotter and more flushed than her tea—on the top of the climb up to the "Big House," as we all call it—had already made her.

"We do not consider Miss Rankin is acquainted with the best set," was the ominous pronouncement of the doctor's wife, given with that studied elegance that, as Bethia declares, makes some of us thankful to be vulgar. "She is a very worthy person, but, as I am aware you have not moved in Kildree circles, Lady Maitland, I think I ought to mention that Miss Rankin has no social position; and Mrs. MacCulloch will, I feel sure, corroborate what I say."

"I am sure," gasped Mrs. MacCulloch, growing hotter and more flustered every minute, "I am sure Fergus always speaks most highly of Miss Rankin, and of course her father, as we all know, was greatly looked up to, being as he was. . . but at the same time I quite understand, as Mrs. Wilsone-Browne has just said. . not that my opinion is of any value. . but if Fergus were here . . ." and here she stopped, stranded among shoals too intricate for her piloting.

"She comes of a very old and respected family," Lady Maitland began, for how should she know that Mrs. Wilsone-Browne's birth is a source of keen mortification to the older section of Geesekirk society? Naturally none of us like to feel that a friend so liked and respected as the Doctor has a wife whose origin has never been satisfactorily accounted for. It is felt to be a slur on us all, and, for his sake we never allude to it. Mrs. MacCulloch's sensations then may easily be imagined, and no doubt her horror was depicted on her face, for, with wonderful tact, as the Minister's wife always says when describing the incident to

her intimates, her ladyship went on as if unaware of any awkwardness :

“ And the Rankins and the Maitlands have been friends for generations.”

“ Indeed,” sniffed Mrs. Wilsone-Browne, “ I was not aware of that.”

“ We’ve known old Miss Rankin since we were babies,” Bethia declared, rushing headlong to the rescue of her mother, “ having tea with her and over-eating myself on dropped scones and honey is one of the treasured recollections of my childhood.”

“ Indeed, Miss Bethia, you surprise me,” was the politely sceptical reply. For to assure one whose drawing-room windows command Miss Rankin’s front gate that there is any close acquaintance between the Maitlands and the daughter of their late man of business was, to speak quite frankly, ridiculous.

“ By the way, children,” said their Mother, whose heightened colour alone gave any sign of her outraged feelings, “ I settled when I was there this afternoon that you would go to tea, and renew your acquaintance with the dropped scones and honey, some day soon. And now,” she went on, in the extremely dignified tone that had once provoked from Bethia the avowal that she ‘ could imagine nothing more crushing than Mother being polite to you,’—“ And now, shall we finish settling the business arrangements we were making ?”

These knotty points discussed and the two ladies departed, Bethia turned to her Mother and catching her by both arms, so as to look full into her face, asked :

“Honest injun, Mummie, did Miss Rankin ask us to tea?”

“I never said so. I only said that when I was there I had settled it—and so I did . . . in my own mind.”

“Jesuit.”

“Jesuit yourself. How about your own childish recollections, Miss B.? That was rather a long bow . . . I thought.”

“But don’t I remember it, Mother? I thought I did. Where was it then that we over-eat ourselves? Or was it only me? I know it was somewhere—in one of those cottages, I mean—and always thought it was there. Don’t you remember, A.?”

“No, I’m sure I never went there.”

“Well, then it must have been only me—unless I dreamt it. I was with old Nanny, I know.”

“It was not with my knowledge, and I really thought you had rushed to my rescue quite regardless of truth.”

“So I would, if it had been necessary, as you know very well, Mrs. Mum.”

“What I don’t understand,” Alison remarked solemnly, “is, why you and Mother had to say these things. What was it all about?”

“Oh, A. . . . Surely you saw? If you didn’t no one can explain.”

“I saw nothing that made it necessary to invent a lot of nonsense. But,” and A.’s tone was suggestive of making a concession to folly, “I can only suppose you thought you were being funny.”

At that, collecting her hat, gloves and other

accessories with the air of quiet precision that is apt to have rather an irritating effect on her family, Alison proceeded slowly across the lawn and disappeared, through the open windows of the library, into the house.

“Mummie, what’s the matter? We weren’t bad to her, were we?”

“I hope not. But it’s curious, isn’t it, how these dear ladies and their point of view roused something in us that left A. perfectly calm.”

“Alison often doesn’t seem to see things the same, somehow. I suppose she was cut out on a different pattern.”

“Fortunately for her, I daresay.” Lady Maitland’s sigh seemed to her child very pathetic.

“Well anyhow, I’m jolly glad you and I are alike. Did you do it on purpose—or was it ‘quite inadvertent, my lady,’ as Fullarton would say? For I’d have you to know,” the girl went on, subsiding on to the grass at her Mother’s feet and speaking in the half-serious, half-teasing tone that means more to that Mother than any demonstration of affection, “that, in spite of our numerous failings, I am most grateful to you for concocting me after the same fashion as yourself; so that, however foolish we both are—and specially when we seem most foolishest—we both always understand.”

Effie Maitland looked into the clear, honest, earnest eyes raised to her own, reading the trust and devotion hid behind their laughter with a sudden inexplicable compunction.

“I . . . I’m not . . .” she began.

“ Oh yes, you are,” Bethia assured her, “ you always are to me—and to A. too, . . . yes, really and truly to all of us . . . always.”

There was a long silence. Both mother and child were dreaming. The dogs were asleep. In abandonment of bliss a bird poured out his evening song.

“ I . . . I wonder what they are doing now,” Bethia whispered at last.

“ Yes, . . . one is always wondering . . . all the time.”

The sun, setting in an opal sky, rested with a smile like a blessing on the peaceful scene, typical of home and harmony and all that seems to us to be best and sweetest in life. . . . And the same sun—Ah, is it possible?—was setting over a scene so different . . . so terribly, so piteously different . . . that agonised hearts echo the Soul’s dumb protest. . . . “ O, God . . . *must* such things be?”

Suddenly Bethia spoke again—and to her mother her voice had the far-away sound of wind whispering through woods.

“ Why do you think it all is, Mummie?” she asked.

“ What is, Child?”

“ The War . . . and all this awful terror and horror. . . .”

Effie shivered as if the gentle breeze stirring the

lime tree chilled her. "I . . . how can I tell, B.?" she answered tremulously.

"I don't know, only I thought—perhaps—you might. For, surely, Mother, there must be some reason—somewhere? Things can't happen without—can they? . . . Yet one looks round at all this—here . . . and thinks of them—there . . . and it's all so impossible."

"And you, B. . what do you think yourself?"

Her voice sounded to Lady Maitland unnatural—as if it did not belong to her but was the voice of someone else asking a question to which they did not choose to own there was an answer.

"I . . I don't know, Mummie. . Only I have a sort of feeling it might be because . . for some reason . . we needed it . . . Because we haven't been, somehow, quite what we were meant to be. . . And I thought, perhaps, you felt that too."

The breeze died away . . The shadows crept nearer and nearer. . The world seemed holding its breath. . And in the silence and stillness that which so often seems unreal became the only reality. . .

Then a soft booming sound—gradually increasing to die as gradually away again—blended, not unpleasantly, with the twilight mystery.

"Goodness. There's the dinner gong. Come and change quickly, B. . . And. . . and don't let's be morbid."

CHAPTER VI.

“ Did you say someone was coming to luncheon, Mother ? ” asked Alison, entering the room with that preoccupied and important air so many of us are beginning to assume on the strength of our novel avocations.

“ Yes, the Cleggs. They’ll be here in a moment I suppose. ”

Lady Maitland was rapidly dashing off a note for the 2 o’clock post, and spoke in snatches.

“ Clegg. What a name ! Who are they ? ” asked Bethia, looking up from the Red Cross pamphlet she was studying with puckered brow.

“ What Mr. Patrick calls the lubricators of the huge machine. . . He is Sir Thomas. . . Business has taken him to Glasgow to-day. . so the son comes instead. . Mr. Patrick’s detained too. . at a Meeting. . Hospital. . he has just telephoned. . so we’ll have to cope with them alone ! ” She finished addressing the envelope and threw it on the floor, where a goodly pile awaited collection and stamping by the butler.

“ And Lady Clegg ? ”

“ Well, she’s Sir Thomas’s wife. I don’t know anything else about her. But she seemed a nice body when I talked to her the other day at the Patrick’s . . . in spite of her rather unsuitable clothes. They live in that castellated mansion on this side of Kildree. ”

“ Oh, I know. The cross between an Italian palace and a Hydropathic.”

“ Exactly. It rather stamps them. But that may have been the architect’s fault, of course. The Patrick’s say we’ll like them.”

“ Why did we never know them before?” demanded Alison.

“ Well, I . . . I really don’t know, A. It didn’t seem a very sufficient reason to begin because they built themselves that huge villa and moved into it from the town. You see it’s not a real country place.”

“ Oh, is that the distinction? Then if it had been a country place you would have called?”

“ I suppose so—perhaps. I never really thought about it. Why do you ask?”

“ Because I imagined there might be some sensible reason for knowing—or not knowing—the people who live near one.”

Lady Maitland did not answer immediately. Alison’s words irritated her, but she was too fair-minded not to admit the ambiguous nature of a position that was already beginning to present itself to her in a new light.

“ I’m afraid I’m not very good at reasons,” she said, after a moment; “ I’ve been rather in the habit of doing without them.”

“ I think that is a mistake,” her daughter pronounced, gravely. She did not mean to be sententious, but she was. And Bethia noticed it.

“ I’d rather have Mummie’s mistakes than anyone else’s—what d’you call them?—What’s the word

for not mistakes? It ought to be takes, but somehow it isn't."

"Why should it be? Hap is not the co-relative of mishap, or nomer of misnomer."

"Oh, for goodness sake, don't be so pompous, A. You do say fortune and misfortune and apprehend and misapprehend—which is what we seem to be generally doing," she added, suddenly laughing at herself for being so annoyed by her sister's remarks; "Though," B. added, "you know, if you really want the reason for our rushing into the Clegg acquaintance, surely his having been made a Baron-ite is sufficient! . . . But let us dissemble. . . for our Philistines are upon us."

As she spoke the door was thrown open and the white-headed old butler announced in his most impressive manner :

"Lady Clegg and Mr. John Clegg."

At first sight the stoutish, pleasant-faced woman who entered appeared to be nothing but an animated fashion-plate, her son a gawky young man with more arms and legs than he knew what to do with. Bethia's summing up of them was distinctly unfavourable. Yet, as luncheon progressed, she found herself shifting and reforming her estimates. "Pulling down and re-building all the time," was how she mentally expressed it; and the reasons for this sifting and shifting were rather a puzzle to her.

"What preposterous clothes to come out to luncheon in," she mused, "for a garden party, or Ascot, they'd be all very well—on a much younger woman. And yet," she admitted presently, "if the

incongruity of her hat were not so upsetting, there is something extraordinarily attractive about the face underneath. It's as if someone had crowned a sedate representation of Equity with an ultra up-to-date Poiret atrocity. I suppose she thinks it 'the right thing,' poor darling, to get herself up like that," Bethia finally decided.

She had plenty of time to consider the question, for, with the space that should have been filled by Mr. Patrick beside her, she was odd man out; her Mother being engrossed by Lady Clegg, while Alison, a little too obviously, entertained the son.

"These two seem to be getting on like a house on fire," was Bethia's next reflection: then, a whimsical idea flashing across her brain she reconsidered Mr. John Clegg critically.

"What on earth can they be so engrossed in discussing," she wondered, "why—goodness—A. is expounding, what she imagines—for she can't possibly know—to be our best military tactics. It's a wonder she isn't telling him how to run his own factories. But why is not a young man like that in the Army? . . . It's disgraceful. . . ."

Then, as the young man in question looked up to find her eyes fixed on him inquiringly, she blushed scarlet—in, as she angrily told herself, the idiotic way she always did. So, in order to hide her confusion, she hurriedly plunged into the conversation with the first remark that presented itself.

"You aren't in anything, are you, Mr. Clegg?"

"I am in Business," he answered.

"Oh, I meant in the Army—any regiment," she

stammered, amazed and disgusted at her own confusion.

“No, Miss Maitland, I am not.”

And turning to Alison again, he took up the thread of their conversation, leaving Bethia furiously annoyed with herself and—as a side issue,—with him.

“Ill-mannered lout,” she told herself, while angrily aware that her own manners had not been above criticism, and that “the lout” grew less and less loutish as he became more at his ease—an evolution of louts that in her heart of hearts she admitted was by no means according to precedent—did nothing to lessen her annoyance.

I wonder what they think of us, was her next speculation, and in following it up the pudding stage was arrived at.

“Thank you, it is very nice,” she heard Lady Clegg say, in reply to a suggestion of more sugar, and registered a black mark. Things to eat, according to Bethia’s code, may be good—awfully good—even ripping—but they must not be nice.

“Yet what can it matter?” she questioned, ashamed of her pettiness, and, with one of her sudden revulsions of feeling, set herself to study the best side of what was to her a puzzling anomaly.

And that there was plenty of best side she very soon became aware when a move to the drawing-room and coffee, gave further opportunities of judging.

Lady Clegg had evidently a shrewd mind. That her interests were principally local was not to be wondered at—nor was it, at the moment, a disad-

vantage. She was in close touch with St. John's Ambulance and strongly in favour of its amalgamation with the Red Cross.

"For though I was never asked to belong to either Society," she explained with her pleasant, sensible smile, "I find no one objects to my subscribing to both."

Bethia looked up quickly, suspecting irony, but there was not a trace of it. Only the placid unconcern of one stating a plain impersonal fact.

She had formulated theories as to the formation and maintenance of Hospitals, the organisation of working parties and the collecting and administering of funds. In fact she was a well-informed practical woman, who had, as she explained—with a certain modest pride—always been accustomed to "fend" for herself.

"You see," she went on, in further elucidation of the position, "it is not as if we had always had the money to spend and the establishment to rely on that we have now; for, when we first married, Mr. Clegg—that is Sir Thomas, I mean—was in a very small way of business, and I had all the work of the house to do myself; and before that I was a school teacher. So I would be foolish indeed had I not learnt something in all these years. And it would be a real pleasure to me, Lady Maitland, if my knowledge of the homely side of life can be of any use to you."

Yes, Bethia decided, she was certainly a very sensible woman—a fact clearly indicated by her appearance, and only belied by her dress.

And that even that was accounted for in Lady

Clegg's well-ordered mind became evident through a chance remark.

Alison had picked up a newspaper to establish some assertion she had made, and, in doing so, parenthetically ridiculed the fashion plate that, as she asserted, got in the way of a Cabinet Minister's speech.

"How idiotic these caricatures of what they are pleased to call the 'latest style' are," she grumbled, oblivious of the fact, painfully evident to her sister, that the picture prompting her animadversion was the exact replica of what rendered absurd the decorous appearance of their guest. "Who would ever think of making themselves ridiculous by wearing such a thing!"

"I daresay it would suit some people," Bethia intervened, tactfully, including Lady Clegg in the discussion.

"Perhaps," was the indifferent answer to her glance of interrogation. "I never notice the fashions myself. I just put on what they send me from Paris for then I feel sure I am all right. You see," she went on in that quiet, modulated voice that does much to soften even a Glasgow accent, "You see, Mr. Clegg—I mean Sir Thomas, I get quite affronted with myself the way I keep forgetting to give him his new title—insists on me getting all my dresses from Paris, for he takes a pride in knowing I am sure to be well turned out."

It was said so simply and naturally that Bethia, ashamed of her late strictures, coloured hotly—all the more so on becoming aware that John Clegg's clear gray eyes were fixed on her thoughtfully; and,

as she imagined, not without criticism. Almost, she told herself abashed, as if he had divined her misconception.

Later, when Mr. Patrick, arrived from his meeting, had engaged the younger man in what appeared to be an interesting conversation to both, she took the opportunity to scrutinize him once more—this time from under lashes that screened without obstructing her glance. It was undoubtedly a fine head, well-shaped, with a broad low forehead, on which the flaxen fair hair grew in a quaint “widow’s peak,” strong chin and firmly moulded mouth, unconcealed by moustache or beard. He was tall too and strongly built, though with a stoop of the shoulders that Bethia condemned as a slouch; and a lack of that ease of manner which she was accustomed to in the men of her own world. But did that really count for much? Did it matter?

She was considering that question when again her eyes were caught—and for an instant held—by a glance so keen and searching that her own dropped abashed. This time it was the man’s turn to colour, and he did so with a violence and thoroughness that entirely restored Bethia’s self-possession and even caused her to smile.

Mr. Patrick’s voice, summoning them to take part in a discussion of the business in hand, came as a timely interruption and in the atmosphere of his genial presence much, if not all, of the ice of unexplored social poles melted and disappeared, and an amount of business was got through that astonished the Maitlands when they reviewed it after the departure of Lady Clegg and her son.

“What a nice woman that is,” was Lady Maitland’s verdict, as she watched the huge cream-coloured motor slide past the window and waved a friendly farewell to the strangely bedizened figure sitting smiling genially over the gorgeously emblazoned coat of arms on its panels.

“No Columbus could be more surprised at the discovery than I am,” was Bethia’s comment.

“Now why?” asked Mr. Patrick, returning from seeing the “discoveries” off, “I never would have thought you, of all people, Miss B., were narrow minded or bigoted.”

“Wouldn’t you. Well I’m both. . . I only found it out myself to-day. Though really,” she went on, “I don’t know that Columbus was narrow-minded and bigoted because he didn’t realise what America was like till he met it. And how should one imagine that people like that—who look like that, I mean—would be so. . . so unpretentious and natural.”

“Why shouldn’t they? I wouldn’t wonder if they were saying much the same thing about you.”

“Oh, but they couldn’t. We don’t look. . .”

“Oh, don’t you? That depends on the eyes that look and what they are looking through.”

“Does it? I wonder. . .”

Bethia stopped short, overwhelmed by a flood of chaotic thoughts.

“Well, I can only say,” Lady Maitland announced, “that I have gained more practical information from and through and by that one woman in one hour than—than from almost anyone in the whole course of my life. If they are all like that. . .”

“Oh but they are not,” laughed Mr. Patrick, “that would be too much to expect of them, surely! Not any more than—what shall I call them—all of your lot are like you. . . And what did you think of the young man?” he asked turning to Bethia, a shade almost of anxiety in his voice.

“Think? I thought nothing,” she answered perversely. “Why, I hardly even spoke to him. You had better ask A.”

“Only it happens to be your opinion that I want. Didn’t you even look at him, Miss B.?” the foolish man continued, “he’s a very great favourite of mine, you know.”

“Is he? I’m sorry. I didn’t much notice him. I liked the mother.”

“Which means you didn’t like him.”

“I didn’t think about him, that’s all. To look at he’s quite as commonplace as his name. But even a clegg is useful, I suppose, in its own orbit—or office—though one may not care about it, or even find it unpleasant, elsewhere.”

“He is an excellent man of business.”

“I haven’t a doubt of it. . . a qualified blood-sucker.”

“My dear B.,” admonished her Mother.

“It’s all right, Mummie. We’re only following—quite legitimately—the trail of the horsefly—or clegg. Mr. Patrick knows I was only teasing about his—Adonis, is it, Mr. Patrick?”

“Adonis! Heaven forbid. I am no admirer of your scented puggies, with their manicured nails, and their. . . ”

“Why mine?” Bethia interrupted, “I lay no

more claim to interest in "scented puggies" than in . . Cleggs. But as for manicure, I must say I prefer people's nails to be clean—at any rate at meals. . "

"Have done with your bickerings," Lady Maitland adjured. "Dear me, here is some one actually coming to call. What a hectic day we are having."

"To call. . then I'm off." was Mr. Patrick's prompt decision. And fled, knocking over a chair like, as Bethia remarked, a miniature whirlwind, in his hurricane exit.

Has it ever struck you," she inquired of Alison, as she replaced the furniture on its legs, "that Mr. Patrick does not see very well?"

But Alison was absorbed in the arrival of Mrs. Hartwell, an old friend of their mother's, and neither heard nor answered the question.

"Well, dear thing, I am so glad to have found a moment to come over and see you," was the greeting of a somewhat overpowering lady of florid complexion and redundant proportions who swept into the room, drowning by her continuous flow of words any answers that might be attempted. "I've come to hear all about your war work and tell you about mine. We're all of us doing our bit—aren't we? And we'd go mad if we didn't. Wrong or right the only thing is to keep busy now-a-days."

"Not wrong or right, surely, Chatty," Lady Maitland interposed, laughing.

"Oh but yes, yes, yes. . work is the only panacea—and work all the time. How else could we bear all this strain?"

“ Good work though—not bad.”

“ Dear thing, why should it be bad? Mine isn’t, I’m sure. You’ve no idea how I’m getting along. I’m turning Tillyglen into a Hospital . . . ” And she launched into a voluble description of her plans.

“ But surely,” Alison interposed, stemming firmly the torrential tide of details, “ that’s against Red Cross Rules.”

“ Of course it is. I found that out at the start, so detached myself promptly. Sent in my resignation and started all on my own. No, no, you don’t find me running anything of the Cross Red kind !”

“ I thought you were Vice-President, Chatty. . . ”

“ I was—but I’m not. No, as soon as I discovered I wasn’t allowed a free hand I retired.”

“ You don’t mean,” Lady Maitland interjected aghast, “ that you resigned from a war organisation after war was declared.”

“ What else could I do to get my own way?”

“ But, Chatty, it’s disgraceful. . By rights you should be treated as a deserter and led out and shot.”

“ At eight o’clock in the morning? Very likely I should. But no one has suggested it as yet. And what’s more if it weren’t for me all these unfortunate V.A.D.’s would be still kicking their idle heels while they cursed their idle fate.”

“ Goodness ! You don’t mean you’re employing Red Cross V.A.D.’s in your private Hospital?”

“ Why not? There’s no one else to employ them.”

“And what do the County Director and the President and all the Big-Wigs say?”

“To tell the truth I don’t listen. I believe it’s not liked. But they’ve never had the courage to object—at least not to my face. No one does, I notice, if only you go on cheerfully taking your own way and paying no attention to anyone else.”

“As you invariably have done,” commented Lady Maitland, “but really, Chatty, of all the unprincipled principles I ever heard acknowledged to. . . Why it’s monstrous. Not only are you a deserter. . . a traitor to the Society that reared you. . . ”

“It didn’t rear me—I reared it. . . ”

“But,” Lady Maitland went on, unheeding the interruption, “but you are making use of what you have acquired by fraud. . . ”

“In fact I’m a thief! . . Go on, Effie, go on—I’m not minding a bit.”

“No, I know you aren’t. That’s what makes it so hopeless. You take advantage of advantages you’ve no right to take advantage of, so as to score for yourself. I call it utterly unsound.”

“Oh well, I never did pretend to be orthodox. But do let’s be serious, for I’m dying to tell you what a tremendous success we are. We’re full up already—our own men and Belgians—while the others, if not absolutely empty, are fobbed off with sick. You see I got Bill—who’s really quite good at a job of that sort—to go up himself and see the right people, so we got on at once, and are ever so flourishing.”

“Green bay tree,” murmured Lady Maitland

under her breath, but Mrs. Hartwell rattled on unheeding.

“And aren’t these darling Belgians quite wonderful! I’m going in for them, too. They say we’ll have heaps and heaps over soon. Are you making preparations? No? Well, I am. One must work or go mad. You know Tweekie has gone. . . . Tea? No, no, I couldn’t really stop. Must get back to my Tommies. May I ask for the Motor? I see you’ve a parlour-maid. Didn’t your Pomposo object? Mine did, so he’s gone, and we’ve nothing but maids. Such a mercy, I think, though Bill growls. But as I tell him it’s all in a righteous cause. Did I tell you about Dee-Dee’s six-foot footman who gave up his place because he heard a report that “Her Grace” had forbidden butter and jam on the same piece of bread? . . . Though, as some one suggested, if the price of bread goes up much more we ought to be grateful to anyone for saving by putting both on one bit! She let him go without a murmur. . . so patriotic. . . for he was a real decoration. . . Well, good-bye, dear thing. . . I have so loved hearing all your news. . . ” And, still talking volubly, she stepped into her motor and was whirled away.

“Mother. . . what a woman!” Bethia exclaimed, returning to the room, as, with a sigh of relief, Lady Maitland sank into an arm-chair, “was she always like that?”

“No, at least I don’t think so. It’s like a caricature of the Chatty I used to know, in what feels like a previous state of existence. But I do understand the feeling she has that if she stopped for a moment to think she’d go crazy.”

“Of course you do, Mummie. . I expect we all do. . . more or less. . only we know that we mustn’t. Thank goodness it doesn’t take you like that!”

“I do try not to let it. . And then I have you to help me. But where did you and A. disappear to?”

“She really was talking such nonsense,” Alison gravely explained, “that we thought you would rather we left you alone with her.”

“Yes,” Bethia agreed, her eyes dancing with laughter, “and only dashed in now to make sure there were bits of you left after such an onslaught. And now we must be off to our various lunacy-saving avocations, mustn’t we?”

And Alison’s solemn assent, coupled with her sister’s grimace, had at least the effect of bringing a smile to their Mother’s face.

“A.,” announced Bethia, with conviction, as the two girls mounted the great staircase side by side, “I am going to be a Socialist for the future and renounce what is so euphuistically called “our own set.”

“Why?” Alison inquired, without any sign of either surprise or amusement.

“Why? Well, if you can’t divine why after the experience we’ve just been through, I decline to explain.”

With which remark Bethia disappeared into her own room, leaving her sister to wonder—as she so often and fruitlessly wondered—what on earth Bethia meant; and to decide, as also she so often decided, that she probably meant nothing at all.

CHAPTER VII.

John Clegg was feeling thoroughly disgruntled—the word is of his own choosing, not mine—as he stood that same afternoon, gazing through the massive plate glass windows of Alhambra (for such is the modest name given by Sir Thomas to his spacious villa) at the House o' Maitland just discernible high on the hillside, among the sheltering trees.

In winter you can see it quite plainly.

As long as he could remember John's interest had centred in that House and its inmates. Even as far back as the childish days when the Cleggs had what Mysie Cunningham describes as “no social position,” and lived in one of the smallest and least convenient of the deodar-guarded houses in Scott's Crescent, he had known by sight and watched with furtive interest, the children who lived so near and yet were so inexplicably far removed from him and his.

That Mysie Cunningham—Mysie whom he cordially despised and disliked—should know them added poignancy to a situation which appeared to him as unaccountable as it was unfair.

He knew he would have liked the Maitland boys, and saw no reason why they should not have liked him. Other boys did.

In those early days girls did not occupy much of his thoughts, yet he could remember the thrill that the sight of Bethia's bright ripples of hair, her

sunny smile and clear blue eyes, had given him even then. And the dull ache and longing of the solitary child for brothers and sisters—only they were not to be ordinary brothers and sisters, but the Maitlands.

That—later—it had become no longer a question of brothers and sisters, made his aspirations, as he saw only too plainly, little less impossible of achievement. And now at last when, through a convulsion of the normal, the portals of his fairyland had suddenly flown open, he had entered to find it—or so it seemed to him—further removed from him than ever.

For, without the smallest intention on their part—indeed with an honest desire that it should be otherwise—the Maitlands had caused him to feel, in the very marrow of his bones, what an unbridgeable gulf was fixed between them.

That this was natural, even right, he insistently told himself. Yet no amount of telling made it more palatable.

And, after all, was he really and truly convinced of its being justifiable—reasonable—right?

He was well educated. Not, perhaps, on quite the same lines, but as well and certainly more thoroughly than either Ronald or Jim. He knew, though even to himself the knowledge had never been postulated, he was clever—yes, considerably cleverer than most. If it was so, why should he not admit it? For he could not but be aware that few men—certainly neither of the Maitlands—could have run the job he was running. Though one does not say so, one must recognise such palpable

facts. For it was an exceptional job—far-reaching in its possible results and importance.

Then, to return to the purely social side, he knew other young men as well born and well bred as the Maitlands and they had not despised him. Some were even his friends. And he knew, too, other young men of no better social standing than his own, who had stayed at that House in the trees—had gone out shooting with Ronny and Jim, and made friends with their sisters. . . . Then why could not he? It was manifestly absurd—yet none the less true—that he had felt miserably conscious of being at a disadvantage during the whole of a visit to which, in his secret heart he had looked forward as the possible commencement of something—a friendship perhaps—which would raise from its mediocre dullness a life he had lately found singularly irksome and empty.

That his mother had been quite unaware of his feelings—had indeed enjoyed herself thoroughly—he was fully aware. But he had long been conscious that his mother—devoted though he was to her—seldom saw things from the same point of view as himself, while of his father it might almost be said that he never did.

The somewhat boisterous entrance of that father cut short his reflections.

“Well, Wife—how did the visit go off?” inquired Sir Thomas, in the loud dictatorial voice habitual to him, addressing Lady Clegg, who, still in the gorgeous toilet that had so perplexed Bethia, sat busily stitching at a coarse woollen garment that was funnily incongruous.—“Now whatever are

you spoiling your eyes and your hands over that thing for?" he went on, a hectoring note intervening to mar his genial bluster, "have we not enough servants to do that sort o' thing, and let you have your bit fancy work—your crochet, or. . . what's the name o' that other thing like a jam tart I've seen you jig-jigging with?"

"You'll mean my tatting?"

"Ay, that's it—something pretty. . . and lady-like."

"But what would be the use of it, Thomas?"

"Are ye needing to be useful now-a-days?" he returned, with a quaint mixture of simplicity and half sheepish arrogance.

"I suppose not," she assented unwillingly, "but I feel sort of silly if I'm not. And I noticed," she went on with unconscious guile, "that they were all busy with good solid work up at the Maitlands. Some of it coarser than this. Poor stuff it was, too. Lady Maitland showed it me herself and asked my advice. I would not judge her to be very knowledgeable in materials by what I saw. It's queer," she added, "to come across them that's never turned the heel of a sock, and doesn't know a poor flannel when they see it."

"I'se warrant you could give them a lesson, Wife. But in their position they've no need to know—nor you neither," he concluded, puffing out his chest and positively radiating satisfaction as, thrusting his thumbs in his waistcoat pockets, he slowly tilted to and fro from his toes to his heels.

"I wouldn't mind what position I was in, I could not bear to be idle. . . or let any hands but my own

knit for you, Thomas," his wife responded, quite unmoved by an attitude—both of mind and of body—that was driving their son nearly frantic. "And I would gladly do the same by John, only," with a sigh of genuine regret, "he will prefer the bought thing."

"Small blame to him," commented John, turning from his contemplation of Ben Mattachar—and the intervening country—to join in the conversation. "I'll never forget the tickle of my first School outfit. I can almost feel it now." And he wriggled expressively.

"You said no word to me at the time, John," his mother reproached.

"How could I, Mamma, when you know the pride you took in them—and how you were always rubbing it in that you'd made everything, even to my very knickerbockers, your own self."

"She had need to," his father retorted sharply. "That was when things were going pretty badly, I can tell you, and it was an even chance whether you'd have got your schooling from the State. If you hadn't had a father with his head on his shoulders—ay, and a mother who could set her hand to most anything—you would never have got the education I've given you. . . or been able to come the gentlemen over as you're so fond of doing—with your bought socks and all your fiddle-faddle fancies."

"I can assure you, Sir. . . ." but his mother interrupted him.

"Now, Papa, he doesn't come the gentleman," she protested, "many a one is set crazy by the

feel of these woolies next their skin. My brother James was just the same, and I'm sure no one could ever have cast up to him that he tried to be a gentleman. So we'll not blame our lad for that—now will we?" she concluded with a smile that cleared the domestic atmosphere like magic. "But what are we thinking of, hawering like this," she went on, "when here's your father wanting to hear all about our luncheon at the Big House."

"It's no bigger than your own," her husband interjected.

"May be it's not even so big," she agreed, "yet the House o' Maitland has been the Big House to me all my days, and so it will always remain."

"Well, well, there's something in that," Sir Thomas allowed, smiling indulgently. "And what did you think when you got inside of it after all these years?"

"It's wonderful plain . in a way . . . yet it's grand . and it's beautiful. . . . Yes, some way it's very beautiful. . . . But what grips you most is that it is home . . . and has been so for generations."

"Does it now? That's queer. And you, John, did it make you feel that way, too?" he asked, suddenly focussing his son with his gimlet-like, ferrety eyes.

"Yes, in a way . . . now that my Mother has said it, everything looks as if it belonged there—and to those who live there. Not as if they'd ever been bought and paid for . . . like ours." He glanced critically round a room, the ornate furniture and gorgeous coverings of which certainly were in strong contrast to the subdued colouring and un-

deniable shabbiness of the Maitland surroundings.

“As likely as not they never were paid for,” Sir Thomas suggested, with a knowing grunt, “they’d be looted from a neighbouring laird, mebbe, in the days when nobody that wasn’t of the upper ten ever got a look in. But we’re going to change all that now and show them a new baronet is the equal, if not the superior, of any of the worn out aristocracy. And the ladies? What did you think of them, lad? For I’se warrant yer eyes wasn’t on the furniture all the time—eh?”

The rough geniality of his father’s tone grated on John.

“They seem nice young ladies,” he answered stiffly.

“She’s a pretty creature that second one,” Sir Thomas went on, supremely unconscious of—as he would himself have expressed it—treading on anyone’s corns. “She’d be my fancy, if I were your age, Master John; but they tell me it’s Miss Maitland has got the brains of the family.”

“She thinks so anyway,” John commented grimly. “She’s the sort that imagines she knows all about everything and believes in no one so much as herself.”

“I don’t blame her for that,” grinned Sir Thomas, “ye’ll not make anyone else believe in you if you don’t believe in yourself. But, at your age it would be the beauty that would appeal to you, I’m thinking,” he went on with a sly glance that made his son shiver. “Toot, toot, I’ve been young myself, and I know. . . . Well, well, queerer things have happened—have they not, Wife? . . .”

The colour rushed into the younger man's face in a way that was to the elder exceedingly humorous.

"Hut-tut, lad," he said, giving vent to a great laugh, "there's nothing to go like a turkey-cock for. And no need for you to be ashamed, when all's said and done. For it's you that'll have the handling—some day—of more money than 'd buy the Maitlands up, lock, stock and barrel, three times over. . . . But we won't tease him about that yet a while—will we, Mamma? I am sorry I couldn't get going over there myself to-day, but had my consolation in thinking mebbe John was making the running with pretty Miss B., as I hear they call her. And now that the ice is broken we'll make up for lost time, and the young people'll be as thick as thieves before long, I make no doubt. . . . Ha, is that the 'phone that I hear? Yes, so it is.—Well, I'm away. . . . For where would the butter be to your bread if it wasn't for Sir Thomas on the 'phone? Answer me that, Janet,—Eh?"

And his self-confident laugh only ceased as the door closed behind him. Indeed the last of it probably gurgled down the receiver fitted to the huge mahogany bureau in his spacious and magnificently furnished library.

For some time after Sir Thomas had left the room his son stood silent, fingering the ornaments on the chimney-piece, while his mother watched him furtively. Possibly anxious for the safety of her china in his big fingers—possibly with other, and not less anxious thoughts.

"Mater," he said at last, "did you notice how. . .

sort of simple everything was—up there?” A jerk of his head indicated the direction.

“Simple?” his mother repeated the word interrogatively, “the furnishings were very simple—chintz and such like where I would have looked for brocades, and I noticed a hole in the Turkey carpet that had not been over well darned. There was nothing to compare with this French—what is it you call it again, John?”

“Aubusson.”

“Yes, obby-son,” glancing at it fondly, “that your father gave me two years back.”

“It’s modern,” her son interpolated disdainfully.—“Well, you wouldn’t have had him buy an old one. Your father’s not the man to get cheated like that. . . But as I was saying, the whole set out up there was different to what I had pictured.”

“What had you pictured, mother? And why?”

“I suppose it would be what Mysie Cuninghame described to me made me figure it much richer than it is. But no doubt the great Gallery—where the work parties are to be held—will be more stately than the ordinary living rooms?”

“Mysie Cuninghame,” he scoffed, “I wouldn’t take her measure of anything—least of all anything of their’s. . . How mad she will be to think you have been there, Mother,” he added with a laugh.

“You are always so down upon Mysie, John,” his mother protested, “I cannot think why.”

“And I cannot explain. Only I feel she’s a cat—and a pretentious one at that.”

“Tu-tu,” the sound was expressive, “would it

be because she has always made such a boast of being in with the Maitlands?"

"I daresay—perhaps. For, ever since I can remember, she has swaggered insufferably about it—and that she calls them by their first names."

"She naturally would, having played together as children."

"It would be better taste on her part if she gave it up now they are no longer children. . . especially speaking to people who don't know them."

"She'll be the same age as Miss Bethia," Lady Clegg went on, pursuing her own train of thought.

"No, as Miss Maitland," her son corrected. "She—the second one—is much younger."

"Yes, yes, she would be. And Mr. Ronald is within six months of yourself. Mysie and Miss Maitland will be the pair. Well, from Mysie's description, I'd certainly figured it much grander—and yet for all its shabbiness it is someway grand."

"There's nothing so grand as simplicity," John pronounced, a trifle sententiously. "And it's the want of it that makes us detestable," he ended on a note of disgust.

"John!" protested his mother.

"It's true. We go in for polish and gilding when underneath we're not fit for it. What's the use of veneer on the top of what's just common deal," he scoffed.

"But John," deprecated the poor lady, looking round on the furniture she believed him to be censuring, "it is all good sorts of wood and expensive, not deal at all. Your father likes the look of fresh polish and gilding—and indeed I would not like

myself to see our things chipped and faded like some I noticed up there. Why. . . ”

“ Oh, I daresay,” her son interrupted impatiently, “ I saw all that too.—But it belongs up there somehow. . as nothing does here. Of course I know it’s absurd to expect to look as if you had traditions when you haven’t. . and its mean to pretend. . but surely ”—a smile lit up his grey eyes, the shadow in which had been troubling his mother, “ surely we can be simple and natural without any pretence. Not,” he added after a moment, “ that it was the furniture I meant altogether, but. . . just the whole thing.”

“ No doubt it would be more important,” his mother went on, believing herself to be in touch with his thoughts, “ before all the footmen went off; but I thought it very nice, I must say.”

“ So did I . . . It is beautiful. . . . ”

He paused, and the perplexity on her face deepened as she watched his. At length he spoke again.

“ What I really was thinking of, I suppose, was their dress . . and . . and the sort of ways of them. It’s so extraordinarily natural—so sort of every day and . . and usual . considering we had never met each other . . to speak to, that is . . before.”

“ Their clothes were every day enough certainly,” there was an unusual flavour of acrimony in Lady Clegg’s tone, a suspicion of pursed lips in place of her genial smile. “ I noticed Miss B., as they call her, had a darn in the elbow of her left arm and another in the heel of her stocking.”

“ Had she?” John Clegg exclaimed with

enthusiasm, "had she really? Well, I respect her for that."

"It's not difficult, then, to gain your respect."

A gleam of amusement twinkled in his Mother's eyes; but, busy following up a line of thought of his own, her son did not notice it, or even seem to hear her remark.

"You said yourself the place felt like home," he continued, "and I mean the same thing. Their drawing-room looks lived in," again his glance ranged round dissatisfied; "things are there to be used—not just laid out for show. And . . and their clothes . . I never thought of it before . . but are you sure, Mamma, you aren't over-dressed?"

It was a difficult moment for Lady Clegg. But, happily, long practice in self-control enabled her to suppress all show of feelings her son would doubtless have misinterpreted. In no easy school she had learnt self-control. And, though the feelings were there, the habit of years restrained their expression. It was with an inward "Steady now, Janet," and a bracing of what may be called her spiritual muscles—though analysis of them as such was far removed from her mind—she merely jerked her thread so that it snapped, and, while re-knotting it with deliberation, answered very gently :

"It is quite possible, John, I never have really considered the subject. It seems hardly worth while."

"How do you mean, it isn't worth while? It's surely worth while not to look absurd." The word was a nasty stab, but of that he was unconscious. "Your things are so gaudy. I never thought of

it much till to-day, but when I saw you beside Lady Maitland I knew they weren't right. There are French words that describe them exactly;—but I don't know anything in English that wouldn't sound too . . . too strong."

"I don't wonder at French words describing them," his mother placidly answered, "for they come from the best house of business in Paris. This," and she fingered the fabric in question—a shot silk broché of violently contrasting hues—with some pride, "is wonderful quality, and would wear out at least three ordinary gowns."

"But why get them from there? The people never see you. You can't choose them yourself. They haven't a chance of being suitable."

"Well, it's like this, you see, John. Your father was recommended to the firm as far back as when we were first married. He had business in Paris, as it happened, and we combined that and our wedding trip, or, in those days, we never could have managed it. And he took me to this great big Emporium and ordered me a dress himself. I can see it now—a beautiful thing it was—and the height of the fashion, as it was then, with awful queer sleeves. And from then on I have had one every year . . . except the two years business was so bad—till lately, when he has insisted on me ordering a great many more than I need. And he's not pleased if I don't wear them. For he takes a pride in them, you see, John. . . . And, as he often says to me, and I have no doubt it is true, people would think badly of his business if I was not turned out so as to be a credit to him. . . . Till you suggested

it just now, I had never thought that what they send might not be so suitable to me now—at my age—as they used to be. For, of course, it would always be your father I would think of. And his noticing them and feeling pleased to see me in them is, naturally, the only pleasure the hats and dresses have ever been to me.”

Something in her voice and the eyes raised, almost in apology, to his, made her son, with a sudden impulse—the rarity of which enhanced its value—stoop down and kiss the grey sprinkled but still abundant hair framing a face that was undeniably more attractive without the hat which had aroused—in more minds than one—interest out of all proportion to its importance.

“You looked very nice, Mother,” he said; “as indeed you always do.” And the unwonted compliment left her smiling and content over her sewing long after her son had taken his departure.

What would her amazement have been could she have guessed the fury and disgust of that son at thought of the paternal attitude of self-sufficient snobbery which her confidence had unwittingly revealed. It was not for the first time that John had become aware of similar facts with regard to his father, but never had they struck him so forcefully. And as he flung himself down in the worn arm-chair in his own shabby den at the other end of the house, he asked himself bitterly why anyone who could possibly avoid it should ever make acquaintance with any member of a family of whom such a one was the head.

CHAPTER VIII.

EXTRACT FROM MYSIE CUNINGHAM'S JOURNAL.

The War, I can see, is going to make vast changes. Already one notices the beginnings of extraordinary deviations from long accustomed ways.

Some of these changes I intend to note, as, once they have become established, it may be forgotten that they were innovations brought about by the World War.

Firstly, then, there is the complete revolution—for it is no less—in the attitude of the Maitlands towards the Society of Geesekirk and Kildree. This, of course, makes no difference to me personally; as I have always been in what I think may be suitably called both sets of the Rival Factions. But, for others, it may well be designated a revolution; when, all in a moment, the Maitlands have completely turned round; and, throwing aside their former extreme exclusiveness, have rushed into intimacy with everyone. I feel sure this is a very serious error of judgment on their part; and dear Mamma, with whom I have discussed the matter thoroughly, entirely agrees with me. She has always been most careful; and, if Lady Maitland had come to us for advice, we could have named those whom she should—in her exceptional position—know, while indicating the exact degree of intimacy to be accorded to each. In this connection

I have the Cleggs particularly in mind. For, although his having been lately created a Baronet undoubtedly gives him a position, there are other circumstances to be taken into consideration; and in neither Mamma's judgment nor my own, is it desirable to include them in what may perhaps be best described as our special Circle. It was, therefore, a great shock to us both, to learn that they had actually been taking lunch at the Big House, as it is frequently called—though, indeed it is not bigger than many others, and our reception rooms are much more spacious and lofty.

To make things more awkward, Lady Maitland—without reflection, or asking anyone's advice—has consulted poor old Miss Rankin of all people. There is no doubt of this fact, for Miss Rankin's Janet is Aunt to Christina Baird—a very common, flashy sort of a girl, who is always putting herself forward and has taken up Red Cross work for no other purpose)—and she told the District Nurse who told Adeline Wilsone-Browne and she told me—so I got it very straight. It must have been quite a sudden thought of Lady Maitland's, for she called, without any warning, on Monday; when, of course, Miss Rankin having—like the Patricks—only the one servant, Janet was at her washing and could not go to the door. So the poor old lady had to open it herself, which must have been very mortifying for her.

But what is still more serious is that Miss Rankin is to have the making out of the lists for the work-parties, of which Lady Maitland spoke the other day at the Patrick's. So that every sort of person

will now be asked to them. This is most unfortunate, and I foresee there will, owing to this precipitancy on Lady Maitland's part, be terrible complications. However, I have formed a plan by which to keep our own little coterie quite apart and, I trust, avoid the unpleasantness we might otherwise be involved in. (Coterie is a French word, of course, I know, but I have not put it in italics as it is in Soule's, and can therefore be regarded as English.)

Besides this very serious mistake on the part of the Maitlands, there is the attitude they have adopted towards enlistment.

Soldiers must, no doubt, be got if they are required; but they should not be removed from situations where they are indispensable. And I must say I do not see what right Alison had to ask how many of our men have enlisted. I took care not to tell her; but, as a matter of fact, none of them have; as it would put us to very great inconvenience if they did. Because the Maitlands choose to make the War an excuse for reducing their establishment—and we heard some time ago they would have to retrench, on account of Ronny's extravagance—I do not see why we, who are well able to afford ours, are to be expected to do so—though I quite understand that they would wish us to do so.

It seems that, when War was declared, Sir Harry had all the men—outside and in—up before him and told them it was their duty to enlist; and that, as he was not going to encourage disloyalty, he would sack them if they did not. It was Saunders,

our head gardener—a very superior man dear Papa got from Kew—told Mamma, and seemed to anticipate something the same; in which case, as he very naturally said at once, he could not have stayed on; being accustomed to several under him. I am sure he was very relieved when Mamma assured him she saw no necessity for turning away good servants. And, indeed, how could we get on with no one to look after the houses? Especially with Mamma so dependent as she is on hot-house fruit, besides paying almost all the wages by selling what we do not want ourselves—being only two in family now.

There is also a great deal of talk about Red Cross. I have never wished to have anything to do with it, and do not see why I should now; although several have been most pressing in asking me. But, as I tell them, they will find it is very different now there is real war—and perhaps later on nursing to be done—than when it was merely dressing up like a nurse and talking about “First Aid,” as they call it. Mamma does not at all approve of girls of our class doing that sort of thing—and perhaps being expected to nurse quite common soldiers. Indeed I do not see how any nice-minded girl can wish to; for even to think of it makes me feel quite uncomfortable. So I refused, explaining to Bethia Maitland, who was most anxious I should join, all my reasons, just as I have put them here; and she was quite huffy. But I feel sure I am right, and if it ever comes to real nursing she will find that I am; for I have heard what goes on in Hospitals from Adeline, who had a friend who was a nurse and told her all sorts of shocking things.

We talked—I mean Adeline and I, not B. of course—about Mr. Patrick, too; and I told her how Mamma and I have always thought there is something wrong about his having left the Navy. For to say a man would leave on account of his wife's health, if he was getting on well, is absurd. But we shall soon know, as Adeline says that her brother writes her that everyone who is any good will be given what he called: "some job or other." now. So, as we agreed, it would be very peculiar—I was going to have put suspicious, but perhaps that is rather a strong word to write, even if one thinks it—if Mr. Patrick remains here doing nothing. Adeline warned me not to speak of this to anyone; as, she says, it is very easy to get into libel trouble if one is not careful. I was rather annoyed that she should have thought I was likely to be so foolish, for I certainly would not think of saying anything until I am quite sure. But Adeline is always inclined to treat me as if I were a child, and I have quite made up my mind not to give in to it any more. So that, this afternoon, when she laughed at me for saying I intended to wear the same frock at the work-party as I had at the Patricks, declaring that: "any old knock-about was good enough for fuddling among wools," I felt obliged to explain that I was quite able to settle for myself what was suitable. Indeed, as I told her, I do not even always consult Mamma, as I consider it a mistake to get into the habit of depending on other people's opinions. Perhaps it was because of this that Adeline spoke as she did about another matter which I must say I think it was very bad taste for

her to bring into the conversation at all. It is a matter that—as it is quite private and in a different category from the other things in this Diary—I hesitated to enter into, but must do so now; as it is connected with what Adeline said, and was the cause of a disagreement between us that became quite an altercation. Indeed it was on account of it that I decided not to take her into my confidence about my plan for the work-party to-morrow.

And now I will put down here the Incident that gave rise to the discussion, and which, in its natural sequence, should have been noted considerably earlier. No doubt I could easily have written it on a separate sheet and inserted it on the date at which it took place; but as a feeling of, I think, very natural delicacy prevented my doing so; and it is only for the reasons I have just mentioned that I am now doing so, I feel sure I am right in acting as I am now doing. I have not mentioned it to Mamma, nor do I intend to; as she might very possibly make too much of it,—or, perhaps, have considered I had not shown sufficient reserve. For dear Mamma, leading the secluded life she does, is rather old-fashioned in some of her ideas. I only mentioned it to Adeline because she has always been my confidante; and now sincerely regret having done so.

The Incident to which I allude—and which I will not attempt either to minimise or augment, but merely state perfectly simple and naturally how it took place—occurred at the Patricks' tea-party in this way.

As I was taking leave, Lady Maitland called me

back to ask if I would be Secretary of the S. and S.F.A.—a post which I now hold—and, consequently, I found myself alone, when finally taking my departure, all the other guests except the Maitlands having left. As I passed through the Patricks' little garden, intending to take the direct path home, I heard footsteps behind me and found myself overtaken by Jim Maitland, who seemed very glad to see me.

“Ah, Miss Cuninghame,” he said, which was rather formal considering we had played together as children, but I am sure shows very right feeling on his part, now we are grown up, and it would certainly be my place to give him leave to call me otherwise; “how is it I have not seen you to speak to before?”

I answered something about his having been so surrounded and not wishing to push myself forward—though an old playfellow, which might be thought to give me more right to do so than some. I remember glancing up at him and thinking how handsome he looked standing there with the evening sun on his nice crisp auburn hair. (We used to call him ‘Carrots’ when we were children.) And he smiled so pleasantly, as he answered:

“Well, may I walk with you now, and we’ll go by the Glen?”

I felt pleased and wanted to go, but of course begged him not to think of coming out of his way on my account. And it was then he said: “Your way is my way,” which I really do think was rather marked: especially the way he said it. And I thought that before Adeline said anything.

At first we talked of quite usual things; such as Mr. Patrick's roses, for he is considered to be a great gardener; and the unusual heat and want of rain. Then I several times attempted to make suitable observations about the War: saying what a difference it would make, asking him if he liked the idea of fighting, and remarking how brave I thought a man must be to face such dangers. But he always seemed to want to get away from that and recall our childish reminiscences. As we went along I had picked some rosemary. Then, when we got to the gate and were going to say 'good-bye'—as, of course, I would not have wished to be seen walking with him along the public road to Balmoral; (for that is the name dear Papa gave to our beautiful home, which he had built after the style of Queen Victoria's Highland home)—I held out the rosemary to him saying:

"Does it not smell sweet Mr. . . it seems so stiff to call you anything but Jim, when we have been talking so much about our childhood together—does it not?"

"And why should you?" he said, smiling in such a cordial way. "I always think of you as Mysie. And always will, in that pretty frock, and with your nice fluffy hair shining like a halo in the sun. Do you remember how I used to tug it, when it was in a pig-tail down your back?"

I felt my face go quite flushed as I admitted I did.

"Then give me that bit of rosemary for remembrance!" he said. And I gave it him. . . And he squeezed my hand quite hard as he said "Good-bye." . . .

“Then you are really leaving us at once?” I asked, which was quite a natural remark under the circumstances, and he replied: “Yes, we are both off to-night. Mother seems to think it hard we’ve got to go at once, but if it hadn’t been for that ridiculous quarantine for measles we’d have been at manœuvres like everyone else and. . . and might never have seen any of you again. . . .”

There was undoubtedly something peculiar in his voice as he said it (and a hesitation which I have tried to indicate thus:)

He looked away at the hills and the loch, and it might quite well have been one of the moments so often described in novels. Adeline declares it was; but, even if her suggestion (or supposition) is correct,—and I do think it may be—I consider it was wanting in delicacy of her to refer to it in the way that she did. And so I told her, which, as I could plainly see, she did not much like. However it is most romantic and interesting, and I do not now regret having entered it in my Diary. Especially as it can quite be counted as another incident connected with the War.

The only other thing to note here is that when I looked back (at the corner just before the Gordon’s Head) he had not moved, but was still standing at the little gate, leaning over it and gazing intently at something. I could not say whether he was looking at the hills or after me; for of course I turned and walked on quickly, in case he might see I had looked back and think it not nice of me.

Perhaps, as I am to put everything down in this

Diary, I ought also to say that I still have a bit of the rosemary.

It is between the leaves of my Bible. There cannot be any harm in that, as I picked it myself. If he had given it to me perhaps I should have felt it was not a suitable place.

But he did not.

I want to put that down very specially here, because that is one of the horrid things Adeline said. There were two horrid things. One was that he gave me the rosemary, and the other that I was putting on the same frock to go to the Maitland's work-party because of what he said about it.

And neither of them was true.

Though, even if they had been, I would have told her they were not.

CHAPTER IX.

Many incidents of that first working party will remain vividly pictured in the minds of those who were present. But perhaps Bethia's description given next day to Mrs. Patrick does them the fullest justice.

“Mrs. MacCulloch and Miss Rankin and one or two others came in the morning, you know, Mrs. Patrick, and helped us to get the Long Gallery in order. How I wish you had been there.”

“So do I. But you're going to describe it to me so that I'll be able to believe I was.”

“I'm going to try. But I'm afraid I'll be rather lop-sided, for I was so enthralled by Miss Rankin I kept near her all the time.”

“Then you like her?”

“Like her! I simply adore her. She is priceless. But let me begin at the beginning. First of all, you must realise how utterly disapproving the ancestors were. You never saw anything so supercilious as the way they looked down on the piles and piles of wheeling and fingering on common deal tables, and the bales of flannel that have taken the place of the lovely furniture they always seem to be asking us to admire and praise them for having collected. I was rather afraid I might have shocked Miss Rankin when I said that to her and that I supposed they wouldn't be any less scornful when the company arrived—for one does rather sympathise

with their hating to be invaded, but she just answered quite gravely that : “ whatever expression may have been given to them by the portrait painters—and some o’ them look fairly foolish, poor bodies,—I’m thinking they’ll have come round by now to a better sense of proportion.”

“ Her own criticism of ‘ thae grand folk from Kildree ’ was much more scathing, however, than anything I had suggested for either myself or my ancestors.”

“ She doesn’t mean half of it, for she’s the kindest-hearted woman I ever knew.

“ I’m sure she is. And that’s why you can enjoy all her sarcastic remarks quite comfortably.”

“ And you, I suppose, encourage her.”

“ Of course I do. And, Oh, Mrs. Patrick, don’t you love the way her eyes twinkle out from among all the folds and wrinkles of her dear old face when she comes out with something extra caustic and biting? I’ve made the most splendid ‘ ’pact ’ with her that she’s always to speak her very Scotchest to me so that I may learn all her wonderful words and phrases. So that now her great joke is to try and puzzle me—and what’s more, she succeeds fairly often, though I thought I was pretty good at ‘ the Scotch ’ myself. I told her I partly wanted to shock that absurd little Mysie Cunningham, who thinks it isn’t “ genteel ” to be able to speak her native language. So she laughed, declaring : “ Weel, I’ll easy do that, for I think I get Scotcher and Scotcher—like I get more and more set in my bones—the older I grow. And I’ll admit to ye that as soon as I see some o’ thae high fleein’ ones

come mimpitty primpitty into a room the gude brod Scots juist comes pourin' oot o' my mooth like water doon the roan after a thunner plump. So I'll reely enjoy myself to see the soor-dook faces o' them."

"She's got an apt pupil, B."

"Oh, but soor-dook did for me entirely, and I had to humble myself and ask what it meant, which delighted her."

"And what does it mean, pray?"

"Butter-milk. Miss Rankin's explanation was: "Did ye never hear tell of the milk-man that enlisted in the Militia, and how they all cried after him: "See to the soor-dook sodjer."

"It would come in quite appropriately now for some of the recruits."

"That was my brilliant suggestion, also. But she was "fearful there's no any of them wi' grip enough o' their mother tongue to use it."

"It hardly sounds," Mrs. Patrick suggested, "as if the dear old lady was going to be as helpful as I hoped in forwarding our great effort towards mutual understanding and friendliness."

"Oh, don't say that, Mrs. Pat. It's only an outside acerbity—a sort of sharp bitterness of the rind. Inside she's as sweet as can be. But it wouldn't be Miss Rankin if she didn't say those sort of things—and no one could mind them from her."

"Are you sure? I don't know that I'd like it much myself."

"You wouldn't mind really. . . nor would I."

Why one often sees how absurd one is being oneself, and laughs.”

“One’s own laughing at oneself has no sting. Miss Rankin’s criticisms might sometimes be thought to have.”

“Well I like them—and her. . Don’t think me ill-natured to repeat them—for I’m not. And it’s a good deal my fault she ever said them. You see, before they came, I asked her to describe everyone to me. And the lovely part of it was I recognised each one. . . But I’d hate to be horrid. . . and you know it was only fun.”

“Yes, I know, B., and I expect I was silly . . Go on . . I am really longing to hear.”

Well, she gave me any amount of sort of pen and ink sketches, if only I could remember them right. Let me see . . . There was one—Mrs. Aird was her name—who is : “a black-a-vised woman wi’ a neb on her like to my Zedikiah—but its weel gilded . . my Sakes it had need to be !. . . And a mooth more resembling a pirlie-pig than what you’ll usually see on a Christian face.”

A pirlie-pig, let me tell you, is what we used to call a penny-pig, and keep our pennies in as children. But that was scouted as a modern corruption. Then there was Mrs. Cran—the wife of Baillie Cran—described as : “another o’ thae fear-some gentilities, but the stiff auld fashioned sort. She’s long and lean—the colour o’ curry soup. It’s a wonder wi’ her dachie face she can have the heart to wear the hats she does. There was one o’ them”—Miss Rankin will remember it as long as she’s above ground—“a cross between a canoe and a

butter boat. And the pieces that was in it looked for all the wurld as if a milliner's shop had been flung out o' the window into the garden border. There was bits and ends o' lace and ribbin, and tufts and tails o' furr and feather, and beads and spangles, all mixed in with leaves and flowers and grasses, every colour of the rainbow, till ye'd think to look at it that you were in a deleerium." Yet for all that Miss Rankin believes that—"the boddie is a nice boddie if you could only get past her hats and the manner of her that's like buckram, and win through to the heart of her. Her husband is Fraser and Cran and a real decent man."

"Oh, but I'm forgetting the best of all. It was Mrs. Seaton-Swinton. "That's Sweetie Swinton's new wife," she explained, "him that's made his money—and I hear it runs to millions—in the Kil-dree Butter Scotch and Gundy trade. Ye'll not know what gundy is, Miss Bethia " she asked, looking me through and through with those gimlety eyes of her's. But I did know. For our old Nannie had a rhyme that began :

Adam and Eve went up my sleeve
To fess me down some gundy,
Adam and Eve. .

I couldn't remember the rest, but she finished it at once with :

" cam down my sleeve
And said there'd be nane till Monday."

She declares she knows lots more of that sort, and A. and I are to go to tea with her one day and get what she calls "our fill o' them."

"I've no doubt you will, too. And also make

the acquaintance of Janet and Zedikiah, both of whom are, I understand, well worth meeting. But do go on about the Sweetie Swintons."

"Well, they "inhabit yon gran' turreted edifeece at the Loch foot." Mother asked if it was the one that imitates our House. And she said: "Mebbe it thinks it does. But though Sweetie may lay claim to a pretty taste in butter scotch—and in wives, too, noo the auld one's got away—he has none whatever in architecture." She was splendid when she described how she "Well remembered him handing her wee, wee packeties (it was mebbe the weeness o' them that he made his fortune over) of his own gundy over the counter, with a "thank ye kindly, Missie," when she was a bit of a lassie staying with her Grandmother, here in Geesekirk—and he was no but a laddie himsel'. But now he's amassed a fortune he would not demean himself to thank onyone for onythin'—nor he would."

"When I asked what Mrs. Sweetie was like she said: "Well, ye see she's new married to an auld fule aulder than I am mysel', and that would give ye a queer opeenin of her. She's gotten a cheetie pussie sort o' a face, and fair hair fluffit oot from it. Her and Mysie Cuninghams' reel chief,—that's as thick as thieves, Miss Bethia.—But it'll likely not last. . for two of a trade never agree. Ye'll easy know her for she's sure to be in the height—or as I call it—the tight of the fashion. There's a pale pink dress she has wi' some sort o' a thin mateerial drawn over it. . . well, to my mind, she'd be more decent scuddie. But for all that I've an inkling the creature's not without glimmerings o' sense, an'

I wouldn't wonder if something mightn't be made o' her yet. She's more misguided than thrawn, whereas that skelp-the-dub Mysie's more thrawn than misguided. And there's a hantle difference betwixt the two."

"Poor Mysie, I'm afraid she is rather thrawn," smiled Mrs. Patrick.

"You'll think her more so when you hear all about yesterday."

"Shall I? I suppose the truth is Miss Rankin feels hurt at all these people's money being of so much more account than her intellect, for of course the old lady is just as clever as she can be, and yet they look down on her because she lives in a tiny cottage with one servant."

"Yes, you could see she was sore by the way she carefully explained to Mother to be sure to put "all these grand leddies in the fore front," adding, "and they'll be all the better pleased if Mrs. MacCulloch and Miss Todd, and such douce bodies as them and me, are pushed well into the back-ground. For it would never do for the Merchant Princesses to think you set store by us—or such as us—when in their schemes of the universe there's nothing of any value but the bawbees, and the only ones that's of any account is them that's gotten them. And from their point of view—which has for its centre the High Street of Kildree, Strathpeffer, Pitlochry and the like—they're mebbe justified in their beliefs. For if ye have never climbed out o' the valley to the hill-top and got the wider vision, how would ye expect to believe in its existence?"

And yet," Bethia went on thoughtfully, "it can only be a few that are like that, for it was simply splendid the way they came and how nice they all were. For to them, don't you think, Mrs. Patrick," her tone was judiciously impersonal, "it must seem as if we were perfectly odious because we have never tried to know them before—and only do now because we want them to do something for us."

"Not for you, B.—for our Country and the men who are defending her honour."

"Yes, I know—but all the same I do think I would feel if I were them that we'd been pretty beastly. But they didn't seem to a bit. They poured in in crowds. It was wonderful, and don't you simply love them for it? I do. Of course one felt sure the people about the place would turn up. . and the people one knew. . But there are so fearfully few of them. Yes, I do think it was splendid of them—the ones we'd never known—to come as they did. . And shows such. . such. . . Well, I don't really know what it shows. . but it gave me a lump in my throat. . and. . and a tight feeling here that. . " She broke off abruptly, the tears in her eyes.

"I seem very silly," she apologised, "but things have all got turned upside down. . More than once I felt as if I could howl. . and I'm feeling it now."

"I don't wonder. . . Oh, what it must be to go about just now and see it all happening! . . But go on telling me. . for that's almost as good. By the way didn't the Cleggs come? You've not said anything about them."

“ Yes, she was there, and Sir Thomas. I hadn’t seen him before.”

“ Not the son ?”

“ No, only the parent birds.”

“ And you like them ?”

“ Lady Clegg is a dear. . . but Sir Thomas. . . you surely don’t expect me to be enthusiastic about him ?”

“ Not very. . . no.” Mrs. Patrick admitted. “ Though Pat says he’s a marvel for business. And I always admire a self-made man.”

“ So would I, if he’d only allow me to do it in peace. . . instead of calling my attention to it all the time—like a coster man shouting out to you to admire, and desire, his goods. Only even a costermonger doesn’t ram down your throat how uniquely clever he is to have acquired what he has got. And then he *will* patronise that nice sensible wife of his—as if she wasn’t worth fifty Sir Thomases, for all his amassing of wealth. Do you know she has already got ever so many girls who have been thrown out of work established in a room at Kildree. She seems to have a positive instinct for what will be wanted and how to supply it.”

“ Yes, she’s a wonderful organiser—and so is Sir Thomas. . . She thinks ali the world of him.”

“ That’s only because she is such a real darling herself. The one I can’t do with is the son.”

“ Why not, B. ?”

“ Why not ! The great lazy lump. Why isn’t he out at the Front ?”

“ He isn’t in the Army.”

“ More shame to him. Can’t he go into it,

instead of sitting at home hatching. . what is it?"

"Chemical manure."

"Just what you'd expect of him. Fancy staying at home doing that! It makes one rabid."

Mrs. Patrick looked as if she were about to take up the cudgels in his defence; but changed her mind—and the subject.

"Was Mysie Cuninghame there?" she asked.

"Rather. Her entrance was one of the features of the day—and so typical. It was a stroke of genius, I suppose, from her point of view—though rather on the wrong side of the . . the. . "

"The war web we all want to weave?" Mrs. Patrick suggested.

"Exactly. But it was awfully funny. Miss Rankin was standing by Mother, helping her by naming the people we didn't know, when suddenly she exclaimed in a resonant whisper, 'But here comes the General wi' all her Staff, so I'll better just fall back on my entrenchment among the flannels, or I'll mebbe be upsetting her.' So she did. And then in came Mysie."

"Oh, I do wish you had seen her entry, for it had to be seen to be thoroughly appreciated—though Miss Rankin's "mimpit and primpit" helps to describe her advance up the Long Gallery. One felt, even before she spoke, how triumphantly conscious she was of being thoroughly at home; and how pleased to have the opportunity of impressing the fact on those who—quite unnecessarily, poor dears—felt themselves at a disadvantage because they weren't."

"How d'you do, Lady Maitland, How d'you do

A., How d'you do B.," she said jauntily, as she arrived where we were standing, "I am showing these ladies the way, as they have never, of course, been here before."

"You should have seen Mother's face as she asked, with awful politeness, if the butler had not been there. But Mysie, not the least abashed—it would have reduced any one else to pulp—answered smilingly, "Oh yes, but I said 'You need not announce us, Fullarton, as this is not like a formal party, and I being quite at home here will show these people the way.'"

"She didn't. The little Viper!"

For once Mrs. Patrick was roused to anger. Her face flushed angrily—and, to Bethia's genuine delight, the brown eyes, generally so pathetically wistful, flashed her indignation.

"She did indeed. And I was so furious I'd have wrung the little smatchet's neck I really believe, there and then, if I hadn't caught sight of Fullarton's pompous face, looking so flustered and anxious at having been foiled in shepherding his flock in the orthodox way. He looked as if he wanted so dreadfully to bark that my anger completely fizzled out at the ludicrousness of it. Then Mysie began—quite unconscious I really do believe, of her colossal impertinence—introducing all these special friends of her's to Mummie. And Mummie had to smile and shake hands as if she liked it, till A. had the brilliant inspiration to fetch up dear old Mrs. MacCulloch. Then mother saw her chance at once, and had her in and Mysie out in a moment. And so beautifully politely too."

“I am glad that was managed anyhow.”

“So was I. But we wrong Mysie in thinking she is as easily deflected as that. Presently there arrived upon the scene the most radiantly fashionable Being, recognisable at once, from Miss Rankin’s description, as Sweetie Swinton’s new wife. Really a very pretty girl if she hadn’t been so outrageously over dressed and her pretty face much too powdered. Well, evidently the Minister’s wife did not know her. She hesitated—they were the strangest contrast for that moment they stood eyeing each other. Then Mysie, seeing her opportunity, pounced.

“How do you do, dear Gwyneth,” she gushed, “you must let me introduce you to Lady Maitland. . . Lady Maitland this is Mrs. Seaton-Swinton. You are both such dear friends of mine that I must claim the pleasure of making you acquainted with each other. . . And this, Gwyneth dear, is Mrs. MacCulloch, the wife of our good Minister, and another old friend of mine, who is, I am sure, most anxious to know you.”

To have Mother and Mrs. MacCulloch coupled together in Mysie’s leash as her two greatest friends was more than I could bear, so, for fear of disgracing myself irretrievably at the very outset of what is known in the family as “The Great Adventure,” I was obliged to fall back—in some confusion it must be admitted—on Miss Rankin’s wool trenches. There I found her simply boiling over at “yon brazen hizzy’s impiddence,” yet forced to allow to an unwilling admiration of “the craft o’ the creeture. . for no General could have

executed a neater bit o' strategy. Ay, ay, Miss Bethia, there's no denying that wee puggie is glegger than the usual."

"If only I could give you her face and the true turn of her tongue, Mrs. Patrick."

"You are doing very well. . Go on. . What happened next?"

"I don't quite remember. There were funny little bits all through.. . bits of bye play that are difficult to reconstruct. Miss Rankin was of course the pepper and salt and spice of the whole thing, though there were other gems too—if only I could recall them. Mrs. Wilsone-Browne had on all her best airs along with all her best clothes. She came sailing up to where Miss Rankin and I were installed behind the deal tables, and wondered, with a dying duck simper, what "was going to be done with that vast (don't you hate that way she pronounces all her a's as if they were gas) vast quantities of wool."

"We're looking to you to knit it up," Miss Rankin told her, "into socks and things for the soldiers."

"Ah, I am afraid I am no knitter"—she said it with an air as if it was a merit to be useless,—"but I tell my servants I expect them to be very busy."

At that Miss Rankin fixed her with such a piercing look that she ought to have felt like an insect impaled on a pin, and said:

"Surely ye'll never leave all your patriotism to yer servants. And if it's only the knitting that's your trouble, I'll undertake to teach you myself."

But she only murmured something about "social

duties" in such a ladylike undertone that I didn't quite catch it, and wriggled away as fast as the tightness of her skirt would allow.

"Twa facet creeture," Miss Rankin pronounced, the moment she was out of hearing, "that was meant as a slappit to me." "To you?" I said.

"Ay, to be sure. . . For all the sweetness in her voice ye felt the acid through it, as if it had been rizzer berries. . Ye see I have'na any Social Duties, so can sit to my knitting fine. But she need'na fash herself to try and flatten me out, for I'm nee'bour to the man who said creeticism was no more to him than a skite aff of a tailor's goose. Ye'll not know what that means," turning to me with a triumphant twinkle glimmering all over her face. And I didn't. Do you, Mrs. Pat?"

"I haven't the remotest idea."

"Well, it's a tailor's flat iron, that he presses the seams with, and her explanation of it is that "a slide off it would be as slithery as slithery."

Next up came Mysie with pretty little Mrs. Sweetie Swinton, who had of course to be introduced to "Mysie's great friend B." I'd like to have talked to her, but Mysie simply took the words out of her mouth—only I doubt if they were the same words. When I asked Mrs. Swinton what work she was going to do, Mysie said: "Gwyneth and I have settled to work together. We meet so constantly that will be best."

"But you'll come to our work days here?" I said, again to Mrs. Swinton, and again Mysie answered for her: "No, B. dear, they will be so very mixed,

and Gwyneth, having only just come, it would be a mistake for her to meet those she would not care to know afterwards." Which remark left me speechless and gasping. I thought there was a protest in Mrs. Sweetie's brown eyes, but if so she had not the courage to utter it, so all she did was to give a pathetic dumb look, as Mysie went on to criticise her dearest friend Mrs. Wilsone-Browne's dress, which she pronounced—not without justice—"quite unsuitable to the occasion." "And so absurd," she added, "to see her trying to get past (Mysie says it like gas too) all these flannels and things without touching them."

At that Miss Rankin looked up from her sorting of wools with a snort, and said: "She's like nothing in the wurld but a stranded eel seeking its way back to its native element."

Mysie's expression as she turned away and left us to what she evidently felt to be our hopeless vulgarity was absolutely priceless.

Almost before she was out of ear shot Miss Rankin's fury burst forth. "Hurr to be takin' stock o' the House o' Maitland and creeticising them that's asked there, indeed."

I had to laugh then. And, to teaze her, I said (which is true) I delighted in Mysie—she amuses me so—and I was sure Mother did too. Upon which she got quite angry and snapped out: "Ye'll think as ye please. . and so no doubt will her leddyship. . and so, for the matter of that will I . . . for whoever and whatever we may be, we've all a right to tie o'or ain hoose wi' o'or ain gairters."

Was there ever a more delicious proverb? And

so apt. For I can't imagine anything much more galling than interference with regard to the gartering—or suspendering of one's own stockings. Can you? The dear old thing had got so excited I had quite a business to smooth her down again. And I see one must be careful with her, for she goes off all of a sudden—just like a firework.

It was then I think that A. rushed up ever so thrilled over the Russians, and tore me away to hear “ever so much” more about them.

From what she said I thought Mysie Cuninghame had seen them herself, but it wasn't that at all. Only some long, rambling story about some friend of her's in “the North”—she didn't even know whether it was Aberdeen or Invergordon or Dingwall or any other possible places we suggested to her—who had written to say she had seen buckets of water in the station, and been told it was for Cavalry coming through, and when the Cavalry arrived—for she had had the curiosity to wait and see them—they were huge bearded creatures in an extraordinary uniform talking a language no one had ever heard before. Mr. Patrick was listening to her with the most delightful expression of polite incredulity, and asking searching little questions at intervals, when the loveliest thing happened. Mrs. Wilsone-Browne up and reminded us that it had been Mr Patrick himself who had said the Russians had been seen stamping the snow off their boots on some platform and saying “thankovitch” for thank you. I suppose he must have realised the futility of attempting to explain, for he said “nonsense” rather sharply, and walked away,

leaving them—as I have no doubt they will always believe—indisputably victorious.”

“But I don’t understand, B. . . Pat could never have said that.”

“Oh, but he did, that’s the lovely part of it. At least he said some and we said the rest. . the afternoon Mrs. Wilsone-Browne was at tea. . but only ragging. It’s too absurd that she should have taken it seriously, and only shows how easily stories get started. What I regret is it seems to get us further away from the Russians, and I do so want to believe in them. That treasure Miss Rankin quite shares my feelings, and had evidently heard all that was said while talking flannels with another old darling in a preposterous bonnet and the sort of spectacles one sees in a farce.

As Mr. Patrick and I came up to her she nodded at us, saying—in a sort of parenthesis of her “she-she” with the bonnet: “Them that will to Cupar maun to Cupar. Ye may think ye’ve preventit them, and so mebbe ye will. . by the main rodd. . but before ye know where ye are they’ll have got away roond by some other way—John o’ Groat’s House, as likely as not,—and in from the other side. . . What were ye sayin’, Miss Todd? . . No wires? . . How else will ye get knitting them?”

“I have got three knitting machines and six gerr-els to wurrk them,” answered Miss Todd, standing there looking like a resurrected scarecrow.

“Ye have H’m—h’m, that’s nice. . But ye’ll need wool?”

“Is there any use me taking it off you?” asked Miss Todd.

“No, I cannot say there is. This is the subscribed thing. . . to be given to them as’ll work it up.”

“Toots. I’m for none o’ that. . . Praise the Lord I’m fit to pay for my own. And as I cannot get going to the Front myself—you and me bein’ a trifle over age, Mina,—it behoves me to do all that’s in my power for them that’ll be there. . . And in bitter cold, I fear me, afore we’re through with this terruble business. . . Now what’s all this clash about Russians, Mr. Patrick?” she demanded suddenly facing round and focussing her bonnet on him.

“Little but talk, I’m thinking,” he answered.

“H’mph!”—it was the funniest snort you ever heard—“There’s some can spin a muckle pirl out o’ a wee tait o’ woo’.”

And with that she turned and trotted away.

“Now that’s a sensible woman,” said Mr. Patrick to Miss Rankin. “Not like Miss B. here, who’s swallowing every word about Russians and eager for more.”

“And what for no?” she retorted to my intense joy. “When I was her age I would have been just as daft after a fairy tale like yon. Can ye no figure them champing the station platform, wi’ their swords clanking and the snow thick on their long boots and high furr caps—and its yourself’s been proved responsible for the stories ye’re now wanting to discredit. . . No, no, Mr. Patrick, we’ll have nothing to do with repudiation here. . . Besides”—and her strange ugly-beautiful old face lit up with such a wonderful flash—“what for

should they not have come by Archangel and the new railway?"

But Mr. Patrick shook his head, declaring the new railway proves nothing. "There are lots of railways here. The question is who's in the trains?"

Whereat Mysie's voice broke in again with: "It was impossible to tell, for the windows were all white-washed. However, I know you probably have your own reasons for not wishing to believe what I say, so there is no use my furnishing you with any further evidence."

"Evidence," scoffed Miss Rankin, "yer evidence would be as ill to find as a Hieland man's breeks. . and for the very same reason. Is it yer wool yer seeking, Miss Cuninghame? Likely it'll be lying perdoo near by. See, here it's. And anither jist the marra of it for Mrs. Swinton."

And on she went with such a wonderful flow of weird words and phrases—just for the pleasure of seeing Mysie's disdainful face, I am sure—that even I was quite non-plussed."

"And was that passage-at-arms the end of the party?"

"No, indeed. The end was quite different. It touched the other string. . . the string that is always hidden somewhere underneath. I haven't said anything about it—only the funny bits—but you felt it was there all the time. I. . I suppose it always is. Somehow Mr. MacCulloch exhales it. . Only think of it, Mrs. Patrick, all these years that I've known him (Bethia spoke with the air of

a Methusalah) "I never had any idea he could be like that."

"Like what, B.?"

"Oh, the way he went about from one to the other with a smile and a word—the right word—for each. And how he knows everyone—no matter what sort or size—and is in touch with them all. It made me quite sorry not to be one of his flock. . . For how can Mr. Graham, only coming over for the Chapel Services, really know any of us like that? . . . Though he's awfully nice and I could not leave our Chapel. . . only I'm sorry. . . Anyway," she went on after a moment, "I love dear old Mr. MacCulloch. Even Mysie became a little less Mysieish when he spoke to her, and Miss Rankin was honeyed. As for Mrs. MacCulloch, she beams more radiantly than ever. . . It's as if he illuminated her. She becomes simply effulgent. I'm sure I don't wonder. Having someone you worship like that always with you must be glorious. Not that she keeps him to herself, for she doesn't. That's one of the beauties of it. (At least if you look at it like that and not as a bore!) She is always handing him out, like cake at a School feast—a slice of Fergus to each! She's quite right too, for he's one of our best cakes—and Miss Rankin's another. . . both stuffed full of plums. But I'm discovering other gems. . . Mrs. Baird and Christina, who is going to be a shining light of Red Cross. . . and the Binnies; though of course I knew them before. But they seem somehow to be coming out in a new light. Binnie was there, in his funeral blacks, with his hair sleeked like treacle,

she trotting by his side and herding all the young Binnies. And the Colts and the Airds and the Murrays and the Mackies, and hosts of the grand people I didn't know, but am going to make friends with as soon as they'll let me. It was splendid to see them. And I'm so glad they came. Just fancy, Mrs. Pat, if they hadn't!"

"They were sure all to come."

"They mightn't have. I doubt if I would in their place."

"Yes you would. . because of the war. You would have wanted to help."

"To be sure—so I would. It shows how true what Mr. MacCulloch said is."

"What did he say?"

"That this war was going to make for a great social unity. But it was the way he said it I want to tell you. . only it's going to be difficult to say it like it came. You see it was just at the end, when everyone had got their stuffs and their wools. Miss Rankin was dreadfully fussed because we had such a lot over. Mother made her little speech, saying how gratified she was to see so many had responded to the call of their country—that was A.'s touch, and I was afraid was going to sound a little grandiloquent, but it didn't—and had settled which days we'd meet, and explained that cutting out could be done for those who preferred to take their work home, and so on. I wish you could have seen Mummie. She did it so well and looked such a darling standing there in the white embroidered lawn she got for some function this summer. I made her put it on, and loved seeing how they all

admired her. Who could help it, when she smiled at them and told them how useless she was and how they had got to help her. It made one understand the odd fascination it seems to have for men when women are helpless and silly."

"Your mother is neither helpless nor silly."

"No, I know she's not. But she has that attractive way of posing as if she was. I know it so well. She makes you feel you've got to be extra strong and wise so as to help her—which is an awfully nice sort of feeling, you know. I never can make out how she does it—or why. And I could see they all felt it too and adored her—they didn't know why either. Then, when all the business was over, and everyone felt like the end, Mr. MacCulloch spoke to us quite simply and naturally—not the least bit like Church, though it was rather a sermon. You should have seen him stand there, with Mummie beside him, a setting sun ray lighting up them both. He with his silver hair and patriarchal beard and she like a tall white lily, her head crowned with gold. He said what he thought this war means . . and why God has sent it—or at least let it come. . He believes we have brought it on ourselves—that, as a country, we deserve it. Do you think that can be true, Mrs. Patrick? It seems so dreadful."

"I am afraid I do think it is true. . But it will not be dreadful if we learn from it what we are meant to learn—need to learn."

Bethia heaved a deep sigh.

"Then we must all make up our minds to help each other to learn as quickly as possible," she said with decision. "I like his having told us quite

plainly like that. And it makes you feel so delicious and warm inside to be beginning to get in touch with everyone else. Even the ancestors looked different and not nearly so supercilious after the Minister's little talk—as if they were seeing (in spite of the silly faces the painters have given them, poor bodies!) that there are things more worth caring about than beautiful furniture or silks or brocades—or even the pedigrees of the ancestors themselves. Not but that,” she added, “it was always their deeds I was proud of not them.”

“Of course,” Mrs. Patrick agreed, “and it's awfully nice to have ancestors you have a real right to be proud of.”

“Oh, there's one thing more I must tell you, it's so perfectly sweet. It was after Mr. MacCulloch had spoken. Mrs. Binnie, who was standing beside Mrs. Baird, turned to her and said: “Oh, Mar'get woman, wasn't the Minister grand?” And Mrs. Baird answered, but with reservation, “Ay he was grand—the day.” Upon which Mrs. MacCulloch, who was standing quite close to them, turned a face one great glow of proud satisfaction on her and said: “He is always a wonder to me.” . . . Just think of it, Mrs. Patrick. . . To have a husband of your very own you felt like that about.”

“Perhaps you will have, B. . some day.” Then, as the girl shook her head, added: “A wonder to you. . he need not necessarily be a wonder to everyone else.”

“To be sure. . I hadn't thought of that.”

At which they both laughed.

“And was that the end of everything?”

“No, indeed. There was the best of all at quite the end. It . . it was just magnificent.”

The room had got very hot, so all the windows were open wide, when—it was just after Mr. MacCulloch had strung us all rather up—we heard the pipes coming along the Glen. You should have seen how everyone rushed to look out. The sound came nearer and nearer—you know the way it makes you feel—all down your spine—till at last when we saw them coming swinging along, marching and playing, we went perfectly mad. We waved and shouted. . most of us crying too. . till they had quite disappeared out of sight. . . Then one woman rushed back to the work-tables, declaring she would take every scrap she could lay her hands on “to work for the laddies till we get them home again.” On that there was a regular scramble for all that could be found till there wasn’t a scrap of any sort left . . It . . it was perfectly splendid. .”

Bethia’s voice broke, and the tears were running down her cheeks. “How silly I am,” she said, with a funny gulp that rather accentuated what it meant to strangle.

“Silly!” said Mrs. Patrick

And then suddenly found that her voice had gone too.

CHAPTER X.

Many things in this new life into which all of us are suddenly plunged present problems. But none of them more perplexing to Lady Maitland than the deciding of what Alison and Bethia were to do—or not to do.

“Am I to allow them,” she had asked Mrs. Patrick, “to work at Red Cross Hospitals and this Belgian Relief thing, or am I not? You see they can’t be expected to sit knitting all day. And what else is there for them to do, when all the ordinary things of their age and kind—like golf and tennis and yachting and dancing—are swept away in this whirlwind, and no longer exist?”

But even as she asked the question she knew that she had no confidence in the advice she was making believe to desire. For what could a childless invalid like Mrs. Patrick know about it? So that her “Certainly, what harm could it do them?” by no means settled the question.

Mrs. Patrick is so in the clouds and—owing no doubt to the isolated life she has for many years led—has such an unpractical way of looking at things, that it is difficult to believe her advice is worth having. Yet—somehow—we are all very apt to consult her. I do not understand it myself, I must say; for, fond though I am of Mary, she sometimes seems hardly human, and as often as not arouses in me a spirit of antagonism by being out of

touch with what are undoubtedly questions of paramount importance—or were so, at any rate, till quite lately. Mary is invariably kind and sympathetic, otherwise she would not be Mary, but she is not in touch with every-day life—with reality. Yes, that is, as Lady Maitland felt, what is so provoking about Mary Patrick—she is not in touch with reality.

Yet the question comes knocking, so to speak, persistently at the door of this new, this mysteriously different world, into which we are pitchforked—which is really and truly the most real? Mary's standards of values or ours? . . . the things we see, touch and taste every day. . . or those we only think of—or imagine—sometimes?

In fact, WHAT IS IT THAT MATTERS?

Effie Maitland is not the only one that finds this perplexing. And events do not wait to give one time to decide. They come tumbling one on the top of the other and have to be done—or left undone—now, at once.

For instance, when we first heard of the suggestion that the women in the Red Cross should go round and beat up the men to enlist, the idea was most repugnant to many. Apparently the scheme had emanated from the excessive zeal of the recruiting sergeant, and, after one disastrous day's trial, was abandoned. Indeed, it was, I believe, summarily put a stop to by the authorities as totally opposed to Red Cross tenets, so that I was glad to think that, from the first I entirely endorsed Lady Maitland's condemnation of it as preposterous. Yet, as she afterwards told me, she found herself—

though with every intention of putting an absolute veto on the scheme—weakly agreeing, over-ruled by her daughter, whose very ignorance of the objections that to us were so obvious, made it impossible to explain. And how are you to decide when circumstances are so exceptional as they are at present, and you cannot deny that it is the duty of every one to do all in their power for their country—whether they find it pleasant or not? I must say I find them very confusing. And it is comforting to know I am not alone in my bewilderment. Lady Maitland herself told me there had been considerable discussion on that subject—and many others.

“B., what is this I hear about the V.A.D.’s being wanted to do recruiting?” she inquired of Bethia.

“Oh, it’s quite all right, Mother. The recruiting sergeant has asked us. He thinks if we went round in uniform and talked to the men we should be able to get a good lot of them to enlist.”

“M’m,” the sound was obviously dissentient,”

“I should very much doubt it.”

“Well, we can but try.”

“I wonder if you at all realise how unpleasant such trying may prove.”

“Does that very much matter?” Bethia’s determined little chin was tilted in scorn. “I suppose we can put up with it in such a cause.”

“Perhaps.”

It was a half-hearted concession. But what is the use of dissenting when one’s rôle for years has been to assent—and experience has proved that to forbid, without reason given, merely arouses a

spirit of opposition that defeats its own ends? So, with a little sigh, the ineffectual effort was abandoned. Bethia, noticing the sigh, thought: Poor Mummie, how she does fuss herself!

“Mother!”—Alison’s voice was weighted with grave reproach—“The bath water was stone cold again this morning. I am not complaining. Perhaps it is too much to expect of the kitchen-maid to make an effort and be up before me. But I thought I had better just mention it.”

“Certainly. Of course she ought to be up.” Lady Maitland’s tone had an unwonted note of asperity. “I will speak to Mrs. Jamieson. It wasn’t to say really hot even when I had mine this morning. What time do you want it, A.?”

“Oh, soon after six.”

“And, Mummie, if you *are* having a field day,” added Bethia, “will you hint that my brown shoes are a scandal. They look as if they hadn’t seen polish for weeks.”

“Very well, I’ll see Fullarton, too. Indeed I expect I had better talk things over thoroughly with him, for I can’t help thinking there is something fundamentally wrong. He doesn’t seem satisfied with the parlour-maid, though she looks a nice girl and waits well. The whole household’s rather out of joint, I’m afraid,” she concluded with a sigh.

“Poor Mummie, how you do hate finding fault.”

“It isn’t so much that. I really don’t mind if I know I am thoroughly justified. But it’s so difficult to accommodate oneself to this new mode of living and be sure of the line one should take. There are such masses of things to be done—so

much need of money to help everywhere—that one wants to be rigidly economical so as to have it to give. And yet one has to balance one's own inclinations with all the other considerations, which is difficult—especially when what used to be so important has all of a sudden grown trivial. . . and *vice-versâ*.”

“If it were me,” Alison declared with finality, “I would reduce everything and live like the Patricks.”

“If it really were you I doubt if you would find it so simple as it sounds.”

“I'm quite sure. . . However, it is no use arguing what to do if things were quite different—I've too much to do as they are for that.” And she left the room with great dignity, leaving her Mother and sister to smile at each other.

“I must be off too,” Bethia said, stooping to imprint a kiss on what she called “the unseemly wrinkle” puckering her mother's forehead. “You mustn't mind if I'm being pig-headed and doing things you don't quite approve. They won't really hurt me, you know, and even if they did it'll do me no harm. . We've all got to put our hands to the wheel just now, and not mind even if they do get a bit dirty. . haven't we, Mother mine?”

“Yes, I know, Childie, and I daresay you are right. Ring the bell as you pass and I'll tackle my interview with Fullarton at once.”

“Poor Mummie, must you really? Do be firm; I don't believe he has ever forgiven you for insisting on Albert, who was his last straw, going for Home Defence. And Albert! Shall you ever forget his

dejection, at the very beginning, as he was led away by Sergeant Simpson, who simply wouldn't take No. And his blatant joy on his return, having been pronounced flat-footed or in some way physically unfit. I felt utterly ashamed, I know, and have always hoped some of the maids made it hot for him."

"Well, he has had to go now."

"Yes. And let's hope it'll put the right spirit into him. I really believe, you know, Mummie, that Fullarton, Mrs. Jamieson and Co. are under the impression that, in some mysterious and underhand way, we made the war to upset them by reducing the Establishment (with a capital E.). They certainly disapproved of Father saying he would not keep young men in his service who ought to enlist."

"He promised to keep their places open for them and look after anyone dependant on them if they did."

"Yes, I know. But they ignore that, and put their own interpretation on everything—just like the Germans. . . Mother, does it ever occur to you that some of us *are* rather German?"

"B.!" exclaimed her Mother in horror.

"Yes, I mean it. Some are perfectly splendid of course. And one admires them more than one could ever possibly say. But, it's borne in upon me, that some of us do see crooked. And it makes me wonder whether bits of us—horrid little mean bits that we have never thought about, or felt ashamed of before—aren't perhaps made in Germany, too."

“What a horrible thought.”

“It isn’t that I want to think it. I’d give anything not to, only,” she paused at the door to say the last words very impressively—“every now and then I’m made to. . . I can’t help it. . . I do.”

“Was B. right?” Lady Maitland asked herself, left alone with the unattractive suggestion. It was a mortifying—a degrading thought—but if true, even in so mild a form, must be faced; for, at all costs these malignant “made in Germany” bits must be torn up by the roots and flung from us. In no cheerful mood, yet determined, Lady Maitland got up to ring the bell which Bethia, in the fervency of her ebullition, had forgotten.

If the accusation brought against her household was deserved it was—she told herself—manifestly her duty to find it out and bring them as rapidly as possible to a sense of the error of their ways. And it was not altogether unlikely, she grimly reflected, that in drawing attention to a mote in their eye she might discover the beam in her own.

“Oh—ah,—Fullarton,” she hesitated, as that functionary entered the room with his accustomed air of obsequious dignity, “I . . . wished to—ah—speak to you. . . .”

“Yes, my lady.”

Fullarton, who had reigned supreme over the Establishment (with, as Bethia had pointed out, a capital E.) of the House o’ Maitland since before his master’s marriage is—as may easily be understood—no easy person to tackle. Lady Maitland—undeniably nervous, and fully conscious of the wall built up carefully, brick by brick, to protect intact

the sanctity of that Establishment's tenaciously preserved codes—having put before her Major Domo, in as acceptable a form as she could the points requiring regulation, paused. Then Fullarton, raising a discreet hand to conceal his mouth, cleared his throat in a manner ominous as the distant growl of thunder.

“A’hu-a’hem. . . The fact is, my lady, as no doubt your ladyship is aware, that the circumstances are unprecedented.”

“Yes, Fullarton, I know . . . the war . . .” as she hesitated the old butler availed himself of the opportunity to go on :

“It is not, if I may be allowed to say so, altogether the war, but the . . . A’hu-a’hem . . . unprecedented reduction of the Establishment that renders impossible the customary—and, if I may be allowed to say so, necessary—routine.”

“I quite understand it is very difficult for you all, but I had hoped. . . .”

“Quite so, my lady. We are all aware that an effort is expected, and we indeed anticipated, when Sir Harry informed us of the changes in contemplation, the difficulties which have now arisen. And which, if I—A’hu-a’hem—may be allowed to say so, might have been averted had—A’hu-a’hem—Albert remained.”

This, as Lady Maitland well knew, was the crucial point—the spoke which she herself was held responsible for having inserted into the domestic wheel.

“Surely, Fullarton, you realise that everything—our very existence as a nation—depends on the

young men learning to fight.”

“Certainly, my lady, and were I a younger man—A’hu-a’hem—I can say without reserve that I would have been among the first to offer my services.”

“I am sure you would,” agreed his mistress, forcing from her the vision of Fullarton (at any time within the last thirty years) adapting his ponderosity of body or mind to the exigencies of a trench—possibly in a kilt—and continuing, with laudable gravity: “But those of us who are not—ah—suited to the firing line, have our duties also—and often they may be as arduous, and require as much—ah—heroism . . . at home.”

“Quite so, my lady. I believe I apprehend your ladyship’s meaning, and the present—A’hu-a’hem—vicissitude is connected with the very—A’hu-a’hem—attributes to which your ladyship alludes. For, as regards the question of—A’hu-a’hem—bath water, the difficulty, so to speak, is coal.”

“Coal!” echoed Lady Maitland, unable to trace any possible connection between her butler’s grandiloquent dissertation and that homely commodity.

“Yes, my lady. Possibly your ladyship is not aware that the—A’hu-a’hem—coal-bunker requires daily replenishment; a duty which, under ordinary circumstances, devolves on the h’odd—A’hu-a’hem—man. When he joined the colours, I induced Albert to undertake the—A’hu-a’hem—function. But on his, if I may say so, removal I was at a loss to know where, so to speak, to turn. For a time we were enabled to secure the services of an elderly

individual from the village, but he has now obtained more lucrative employment, and I have been unable, in spite of h'every effort, to replace him. The same, if I may say so, applies to the question of—A'hu-a'hem—boots."

"You mean he did both?"

"It was my intention to convey that information to your ladyship."

"I see. . . Well, couldn't the parlour-maid do the boots, and the scullery-girl the coals?"

"I understand the—A'hu-a'hem—young persons are willing, my lady. But I cannot as a, so to speak, man approve of such drastic innovations."

"But surely, Fullarton, you know that women all over the country are gladly undertaking to fill the places necessarily vacated by the men who have enlisted."

"So I understand from the public press, my lady. Indeed, I may say I have carefully followed the discussion of the question. But I hold to the opinion to which, if I may be allowed to say so, I have always adhered, that the—A'hu-a'hem—sex should be considered. It is not, so to speak, a woman's work, my lady. And so I have informed the 'Ouse'old."

"Then whose work is it to be now?"

"That is, as I understand, the question at issue, my lady."

Utterly nonplussed by such disconcerting absurdity, and unable to decide by what means to attempt the refutation of it, Lady Maitland remained silent. And, unaware of endangering thereby the advantage he had gained, Fullarton

proceeded to, as he imagined, strengthen his case.

“It is extremely ’urtful to me, if I may be allowed to say so, and likewise must be to your ladyship, to have it said that our position is not what it used to be. Never has it been said of this ’Ouse, as they now ’ave the ’ardy’ood to say . . .”

“They say? . . . Who says? . . .”

“At the Gordon’s ’ead, my lady.”

Then, as was graphically, and in the most inflated language, described in “the Room” that evening, it was that Lady Maitland’s patience gave way. “And ’er ladyships eyes became as coals of fire in ’er ’ead” as she wrathfully exclaimed:

“Really this is too much! I will not have repeated to me what is said at the Gordon’s Head. I am surprised . . . and disgusted. . . that you, Fullarton, in the position you hold in this House—and when Sir Harry is away—should retail to me the gossip of a low public house, that I would not have thought any one of my household would have entered.”

“Begging your ladyship’s pardon, my lady, not one of us would enter the place. But reports do—A’hu-a’hem—percolate, my lady.”

“Well, I beg they will not percolate to me. And Fullarton,” the blaze of anger died out as, perceiving the ludicrous perplexity on the old servant’s pompous face, Effie Maitland reminded herself how much further he probably was even than she from being able to cope with conditions that—as he had announced—were certainly unprecedented, “as you know I never—in all these years—interfered with you in the management of this House. . . and I do

not wish to do so now. I trust you, as I always have done, to do what is right. But with everything so changed as it is now, we cannot expect not to change too. And, while quite appreciating your motives, I think"—the smile that accompanied the words did much both to soften and strengthen them—"under the circumstances the line you have taken was a mistake. You see, we women—I speak for my daughters as well as myself and the others—are most anxious to put aside what are considered our privileges and, in every way we can, be of use. The young ladies are, as you know, working as they have never worked before, and I think if you were to explain to the under servants—and show them by your example—that the patriotism we all feel is best proved by doing all we can to help each other in this terrible time, they would be just as anxious as you and I are to do their utmost. It. . . it is rather difficult to put into words, but I feel sure you understand. . . And, after all, what is needed is deeds not words. . . And. . . and Fullarton. . . you and I have been left by Sir Harry in charge of the House o' Maitland. . . Shall we agree that we will both do our best to run it in the same spirit of loyalty. . . and self-sacrifice. . . as those who are giving their lives for us at the Front? . . . and so show that, in our small way, we are worthy of. . . their heroism."

The old servant stood for a moment silent, erect—his head, with its scanty fringe of white hair, deferentially bent—utterly bewildered by words that fell as strangely on his ears as if they had been the sound of Zeppelin bombs.

Then, habit too strong in him to be broken even

by such an upheaval of the restraint he had come to regard as essential to the dignity of both her ladyship's position and his own, he merely replied—his manner unchanged, pompous and pretentious as ever :

“Certainly, my lady,—A’hu-a’hem !” and discreetly withdrew—leaving her ladyship a prey to the sudden shyness following on an outburst of confidence as surprising to herself as it was to the old servant who was its recipient.

CHAPTER XI.

Mrs. Baird and Mrs. Binnie were schoolfellows in a dim past they both refer to as “a while back,” but have drifted far apart—though both remaining in the same parish—for while Mrs. Binnie married the owner of a small croft at “the back o’ the hill,” Mrs. Baird espoused a partner in Goudie’s, and lives at “Sunny Brae,” Glasgow Road; where she now enjoys the full dignity of well-to-do widowhood. So that when Mrs. Binnie “finds time” to go and call on the friend of her youth it is a great event in the monotony of her busy life, and not without interest to Mrs. Baird in her more leisured gentility.

They are a strange contrast; and it is a matter of comment in Geesekirk that the prosperous widow’s face is lean and severe, while that of the hard-working wife of “thrifless Binnie” is round and smiling. Indeed, Mr. Patrick was once heard to say that Mrs. Binnie has quite the outward appearance of the plump and complacent duck off whose back the worries of life would be expected to slip like water.

She is the proud mother of a large brood of callow ducklings, while Mrs. Baird (no less proud) has but the one chick over whom she fluffs and clucks as persistently as any hen over the solitary result of a whole setting of eggs.

Mrs. Baird, I need hardly say, does not “hold

with " the present day views on the emancipation of girlhood. She characterises their manners as "free," and the expression of her mouth, as she snaps it shut like a trap after the word, leaves no doubt as to the meaning thereto attached. Her views are so well known to her own circle that they could well understand her bouleversment (since our invasion of Belgian Refugees we like to use French expressions whenever we have—or sometimes when we have not—mastered their meaning) on discovering that her daughter, Christina, had "taken up" with the Red Cross and joined our local Voluntary Aid Detachment.

The manner of the discovery was—as Mr. Patrick said when he heard of it—quite melodramatic.

Mrs. Binnie had dropped in for a cup of tea and a crack with her old schoolfellow one hot Thursday in October. It is not often she gets the chance, for the care of "eleeven bairns an' three o' them buried," as she would say herself, the house, cows, poultry and washing, leaves little time for social relaxation. At first, naturally, they discussed personal matters, after which there was, of course, a vast field of arrears of gossip to be traversed by both ladies; but, in due time, these being disposed of, less engrossing topics had their turn.

"Weel, and what d'ye think o' the War? Isn't it just ter-ruble?" inquired Mrs. Binnie, placidly stirring her tea, and beaming over the brimming third cup with an expression of serene content, on a countenance somewhat unduly overheated by her hot walk in the October sunshine and the boiling beverage administered by her friend.

“The War!” echoed Mrs. Baird, “It’s a jidge-ment, that’s what it is—and Mr. Baird, gin he was here, honest man, wud uphold ma opeenion; many’s the time he’s said to me, “ye’re right, Bella, he’s said, so he has. Aye it’s jidgement on this generation an’ it’s self-suffeeciency, so it is. A could prove it to ye, so A could, Mar’get,—but maybe ye’d no understand.”

“Maybe no,” agreed Mrs. Binnie, meekly; “A niver had the schoolin’ you had—wi’ marryin’ sae young, ye know,—an’ ma Tummas hasna the learnin’ o’ some; but him an’ me’s aye slippit along wi’oot, an’ whiles A think yer sort o’ easier like in yer eegnorance than them that’s sae wrappit up in aw them newspapers. There’s o’or Wullie, he’s aye bin sich a one as niver wuz for the papers; an’ noo he’s mad keen after the soldierin’! But his faither canna abide the thocht o’ it.”

“Well, he’ll have tae abide it, Mar’get, so he will. Them as can fight’ll have tae fight. Wud ye hae thae Germans comin’ ravagin’ here, wi’ yon Kaiser at their heed?”

“No, no, we wudna like that. They’re sayin’ he’s an awfy yen, that Kaiser Krudger. But he’ll niver get crossin’ to here, wull he?”

“Wull he no? A would’na trust him. Gin he wur to gi’ oor Navy the slip, he’d be loupin’ over here in a jiffy; an’ then we’d jist be sparrows on the house-tops, like the Israelites of old, an’ hangin’ oor harps on the willow trees, as they did.”

“Ye don’t say so!” ejaculated Mrs. Binnie, without any alteration in the tranquillity of her expression.

“Ye-es, ye-es, the lads’ll have all to go soldierin’, so they will,” repeated Mrs. Baird.

“I hae seeven,” murmured Mrs. Binnie, beaming like a nice old-fashioned oil lamp, “an’ three o’ them in the scouts. An’ ’Leezebeth’s what they ca’ a Veeahdee. They’re to sort o’ learn the nursin’ an’ cookin’. Oor Leezebeth’s for bein’ cook. . . A thocht they were sayin’ your Christina was tae be a sort o’ Captain?”

“Christina! Niver! No, no, I’d veeahdee her if she cam’ to me wi’ ony sich nonsense! If it were’na he’s been resting o’wr long, it would mak’ her faither turn in his grave to hear o’ sich a thing. . . and’ him an elder o’ the kirk for ten year an’ more. Christina a Veeahdee indeed! What next?”

“Oh weel, she’ll no be, then”; acquiesced Mrs. Binnie peacefully, “I’ll just be misinformed. . . ”

“Ay, so ye will. But Christina’s in the hoose, ye can ask her yesel’; she’s dressin’ in her room. . Come ben Chrissie, here’s Mistress Binnie come in to her tea an’ askin’ for ye. Aye, here she comes, I hear her fut. . . They’re upholdin’ Teenie, that. . . . ”

But amazement held Mrs. Baird silent as the apparition in the dress, red-crossed apron and white cap of a member of the Women’s Voluntary Aid Detachment crystallised into the solid proportions of her daughter.

“Ou aye, that’s a Veeahdee right enough,” commented Mrs. Binnie, under her breath, “the rid yens are sort o’ Captains. Oor Leezebeth’s a cook.”

“Yes, Lizzie’s an awful good cook. She’s in

my Division,” said Christina, coming forward to shake hands with Mrs. Binnie, the easy unembarrassment she was intent on assuming belied by anxious glances shot, from under drooped eyelashes, at her Mother’s horrified face.

“What’en a nonsense is this, Christina?” cried Mrs. Baird as soon as she had gathered breath to speak. “What clo’s is that ye’ve on? Are ye daft to go dressin’ yerself up sich a sight?”

“It’s my new V.A.D. frock, Mammaw,” answered the girl, airily trying to appear unconscious. “I was fittin’ it on when you cried on me. D’ye no think it’s sweet, Máw?”

“But ye’re never a Veeahdee, and me not knowin’, Christina; ye never spoke of it to me. Ye never tell’t me.”

“Well, you see, Maw, you’re so set against all the new fāshions, I just thought it was better to say nothing till I had it settled,” was the naïve answer, given with an assurance that strove to be assured; just as Christina’s accent strove after a refinement that but thinly veiled its innate agreement with her Mother’s homely tones. “I’ve been working at classes for some time back, and passed my Exams. last month. And now the War’s on and soldierin’ all the rage,” she added, “you surely wouldn’t like to see me show the white feather.”

“A dinna ken what ye mean by the white feather. . . A see nae feathers. . . But A canna abide that dress. . . . It’s . . . it’s . . . it’s. . . .

“Toots, Maw, it’s just a little bit of all right, for it’s the verra same Miss Bethia Maitland’s got . . . and all the other young ladies.”

“A don’t hold with it, Christina, an’ A canna abide the rid cross—and yon cap—as if ye were a servant lass, inste’d o’ bein’ one o’ Goudies’ young leddies.”

“Leezebeth’s got her rid cross too,” murmured Mrs. Binnie, “and the cap and all; but then she’s a cook—so she is.”

“But it’s the red cross that’s the Veeahdee, Maw, so you’ll just have to abide it.”

Some mothers might have resented the words but to Mrs. Baird they had a reasonable sound—for were they not the same she had herself used to Mrs. Binnie. Christina, gauging her mother’s mood, added: “Elsbeth Campbell’s awful put out at not bein’ selected Quarter-Master. . . . But they were all for me; and Lady Maitland herself said: ‘I believe you’ve your Mother’s capacity, an’ll be a great suck-cess, Miss Baird.’ What d’ye think o’ that, Maw?”

An unwilling smile, like a gleam of sunshine forcing itself through the mist, slowly overspread Mrs. Baird’s harsh features.

“Hoots, hae done wi’ ye clavers,” was all she said; but Christina knew the victory was won.

“And I was hearin’ your Willie’s goin’ to enlist,” Christina went on, adroitly turning the conversation to Mrs. Binnie, “Miss Bethia’s after him herself; she said she would, perhaps, be up there to-day.”

“Ay, Wullie’s set on the soldierin’, but his faither canna abide the notion.”

“Oh, but he’ll come round; Willie’d look reel well once he got smairtened up and into the kilt.

Ye'd like to see him in the kilt, Mrs. Binnie?"

"A'll no say a would'na . . . but it'd be real cauld to his legs, him not bein' used wi' it."

"Well then you'll have to knit him a nice pair of flesh-coloured pants, Mrs. Binnie!"

"Christina! Are ye daft?" expostulated her Mother, "Is that talk for a gurl . . . pahnts! an' *flesh-colour*! Did ye iver hear the like?"

"Well, Maw, ye wouldn't want them some colour that wasn't matching his own. . . . There I was only laffin'. . . . I must run now. . . . I've my hat and coat to get, before I start."

And so strong is the maternal instinct, even in the most dominant natures, that "Weel, A niver," was all Mrs. Baird said when Christina's buxom presence was withdrawn.

"Ay, ay," responded Mrs. Binnie, as she stirred more sugar into her fifth cup of tea, "Ay, ay, she's a Veeahdee right enough. Oor Leezebeth's for the cookin' no the nurr-sin. . . ay, ay,—they're aw crazy after the veeahdeein', Bella, ye're no fit to prevent them."

"Well. . . did A say A wuz? An' if there's to *be* veeahdee A wull say ma Chrissie'll be better to the fore front than thon Elspeth Campbell. A'm no sorry *she's* disgruntled onyway. . she hasna half the spunk o' Christina an' that set up wi' hersel' ye'd think she wuz the Queen an' aw the Royal Family. . . An' A'll no say," she went on after a thoughtful pause, "but maybe Christina'll be right to tak' up wi' them that's of her ain day, like. . . D'ye mind, Mar'get, you an' me wuz aye thocht to be among the furrit yens? A wud'na

wish to see ma Chrissie backward neether, that A wud'na."

"She'll niver be that, gin ye did wish it, Bella. Ye hae na' but one, but me that's got eleeven (an' three o' them buried) can tell ye that. When we wuz bairns we had oor bit fling, whiles, but we aye had a sort o' respec' for the old folk. . . An A hae seen me fair greetin' when A had angered them. But ye'll no mak ma bairns greet. They'll stand up tae their faither an' answer him back, as pert as. . . as ma wee Bantie."

"Ma Chrissie's no like that. . . She's aye con-seederate. . but A'll no say but she'll tak her ain way. To think o' her goin' to classes, an' passin' Exams—and me no knowin'!"

"Ayhe,mh,-mh, A'm thinkin' she'll aye be to the fore."

"She lookit smairt in that dress, didna she? An' I'se warrant she'll master them to some purpose. But here she is back, we'll no say a wurd before hur."

"Well, Maw, I'm away now," said Christina, coming to the door and looking in.

"Oh, ye're away, are ye. Will ye be long?"

"Perhaps I may. I'll be back by supper time anyway."

"It's the recruitin' yer after?" asked Mrs. Binnie.

"Yes. Good-bye, Mrs. Binnie, . . So long, Maw, taw-taw."

And, before her astonished Mother could speak, the girl had shut the door and passed the low window. . . a flash of scarlet, revealed by the dark

coat thrown back. . . and down the narrow path, among the pink phlox and yellow marigolds.

“The recruitin’!” gasped Mrs. Baird.

“Ay, Leesebeth wuz sayin’ the Veeahdees has got to gae roond an’ harry the men to enlist. Some’s reel backward. . no like oor Wullie that’s sae wild to get goin’. Ay, ay, but Faither’s agin’ it. An’ A’ll no deny we’d miss his wage, . . a pund a week, he brings me in, so he does. An’ Faither—aw these ’eers—niver gied me mair. Ye see, Wullie’s reel sober, an’ it’s the whusky, aince it gets a’ haud o’ them, that jist wipes the siller up like it wuz watter. No that A’d be for sayin’ Faither’s ain o’ thae drunken yens—but he aye taks his drap; an’ what wi’ that an’ treats to freends. . . Weel, Weel, I’se no begrudin’ it; a body likes to see her man tak his place wi’ ither men. . so she does.”

“But ye dinna mean,” persisted Mrs. Baird, on whom her friend’s flow of words—gurgling from her with the cheerful monotony of the bit burnie that prattles by her own door, away up the glen—made no impression whatever, “that thae Veeahdee lassies go efter the men to enlist them. It’s no decent for ony gurl to lend hersel’ to sic a traffic.”

“Decent or no they’re all after doin’ it, Bella. There’s Miss Maitland and Miss Bethia frae the Big Hoose, takin’ the lead. As A cam by A saw Miss Bethia an’ she cried on me that she’d be after oor Wullie, gin he didna come furrit himsel; an’ A said it wuzna Wullie but Faither; an’ she lached an’ said she’d be after Faither, so she did.”

“A’d niver ha’ believed it,” sighed Mrs. Baird,

whose mind never wavered from the aspect of a subject as it affected her personal interest in it, "nor A wud, ma Chrissie to be runnin' veeahdeen' after the lads!"

"Aye, but they're aw alike," declared Mrs. Binnie, cheerfully acquiescent, "A'weel Bella, A maun be steppin'. Thankin' ye kindly A'm sure for yer cup o' tea, wheech A've reely enjoyed, more'n iver A do at home; where ye niver seem to get settin' to it properly; ther's aye sich lashins o' wurk to get through wi.'"

She rose, still smiling, placidly and continuously, "I wuz thinkin' to tak' a bit daunder through the High Street, an' get doin' some messages. An' A could see in Campbell's if they had ony pink yarn. . . ."

"Ye'll get doin' nae messages the day, neether at Campbell's nor ony ither place," remarked Mrs. Baird sourly.

"Will A no?"

"No, it's urly closin' Thursday."

"So it is. That beats aw'! This wud hae bin the thurd time A'd ha' gotten t' the verra door had ye no tell't me. Tut-tu-tu! That beats aw'."

"What takes aye t' go the wrang day, Wumman? Surely io goodness ye know the days o' the week?"

But the sarcasm was lost on Mrs. Binnie.

"Ou, A dinna ken. Maybe A'll get there again to fin' aw the shutters steekit."

And beaming, as though past mischance and future prospect were alike delightful, Mrs. Binnie took her leave.

“An’ dinna tak’ on aboot the recruitin’, Bella,” were her parting words, as she turned at the little green gate that encloses the twelve foot square of Sunnybrae garden, to nod and smile pleasantly at her former school mate, “As ye wur sayin’ to me yersel’ yon Kaiser Kroodger ’ud be settin’ like a sparra’ on Buckin’ham Paaliss itself gin we dinna aw’ wurk t’ keep him aff it.”

CHAPTER XII.

In Alison's room, opening out of her own, Bethia was standing brushing out her long fair hair.

"I suppose," she questioned tentatively, "I suppose we're not fools to be going out of our way to do things—that are . . . not our sort of things . . ."

"How do you mean, B.?"

"Well . . . descending into the arena, as Grannie Stuart is reported to have said. Don't you remember? One of the great Aunts went to nurse in a Children's Hospital—an unheard of venture in her day—and Grannie remarked austerely: 'She's the first woman in *our* family who has descended into the Arena.'"

"Silly fool."

"But was she? Sometimes I wonder if it isn't we who are the silly fools."

"Why?"

"Lots of whys. . . The things we see and hear every day . . . at the Belgian Relief place . . . and everywhere."

"Really, B. You're so early Victorian, worse even than Mother."

"No, I'm not E.V. a bit, really . . . only, as I say, I wonder are we doing much good by roking in the gutter like this?"

"Gutter?"

"Yes, it is very guttery at times . . . not only physically, but mentally and . . . even morally."

“Rot, B. I’d have thought you, of all people, would see such ideas are ridiculous; and, well, almost snobbish.”

“If it’s ridiculous and snobbish to loathe beastly things, then I am, but . . .” The sentence ended abruptly as she vigorously brushed the thick veil of hair over her face.

“But what?” her sister demanded.

“I don’t quite know . . . only I’m wondering if we aren’t perhaps making a mistake to go mixing ourselves up with what we know little or nothing about.”

“You’re so desperately fastidious!”

“Am I? . . . I don’t think so . . . only . . . it may be instinct, but . . .”

“Oh, bother instinct,” Alison interrupted scornfully, “it’s obsolete.”

“Is it? . . . I’m not so sure. . . .”

“What on earth’s the matter, B? Why, it’s you yourself who have always upheld the doctrines of never thinking evil of anyone or anything, and been so certain that was right. . . .” Then, as Bethia did not answer, Alison looked at her searchingly, asking: “Did anything happen to you this afternoon?”

“Yes . . . but I didn’t mean to tell you.”

“Oh, you’re bound to, sooner or later, you know; so you’d better begin at once.”

“Shall I? Well, as you know, I went out after recruits, and of course was in uniform. The coat and hat are awfully heavy to walk in; so, as I meant to go up the hill to the Binnies, I just went in my cap and apron. Going through Geesekirk all the

shops were shut, as it's Thursday ; but lots of people were in the street, being such a bright warm day, and quite a crowd outside the Gordon's Head. The people who knew me were quite civil and nice, of course, but some of them didn't and . . Oh, A., I just hated it !”

“ You poor old thing, I don't wonder.”

“ I daresay they thought I was somebody's parlour-maid, for the men answered me so oddly when I went up and spoke to them.—I suppose a nice parlour-maid wouldn't have done it ?”

“ Of course not.”

“ So I guessed—and soon chucked talking to the men (it wasn't a bit of use either) and went on to Binnie's. I'd seen old Mrs. Binnie, and she told me, ‘ O'or Wullie ’ wanted to enlist, but his father wouldn't let him ; so I laughed and said I would tackle father. . . . ”

“ Well, that was all right, anyhow.”

“ Was it ? Wait till you hear. . . Willie was out and only ‘ Leesebeth ’ at home. So I sat and talked to her for a bit. She's an awfully nice girl, and so pleased to have passed her Exams. and be a Veeahdee cook, as she called it. Three of the boys are in the Scouts, and Willie is dying to enlist, only it will be difficult for them to get on without his wages. . . I'm afraid they are dreadfully poor.”

“ They oughtn't to be. Binnie has a capital farm.”

“ Well, they are . . and I know why . . now.”

“ Why ?”

“ That's the awful part of it . . . it makes me quite sick to think of it.”

Again Bethia shook her hair over her face so as to hide it completely. Alison, glancing at her a little scornfully, saw the crimson colour suffusing her neck.

“Just as I was getting up to go Binnie came in. He looked rather odd; only I never thought anything, but shook hands with him as usual. When he took my hand he gave me a sort of tug forward, so that I got a great whiff of horrid whiskey breath . . and that frightened me. So I said very quickly that I’d come to see Willie another day and speak to him about enlisting.”

“Oh, so it’s Wullie yer after,” he said in an odious thick sort of voice. “Well, ye’ll have to settle furst wi’ Wullie’s faither,” and barged right up against me. Then I got behind the kitchen table, and he made an awful lunge at me, grabbing the tablecloth so that a whole lot of bowls and dishes fell on the stone floor with a crash. It was horrible. And poor ‘Leesebeth’ kept pulling him back by the coat crying: ‘Faither, Faither, can ye no see it’s Miss Bethia.’ . . . I felt so ashamed.”

“I’m sure there was no need for you to be ashamed.”

“Well I was . . I am. And you know, A., how terrified I am of a drunk.”

“But it’s so silly. . . If you’d only been calm.”

“I can’t be. It’s no use talking sensibly about it . . I just can’t.”

“Then what happened?”

“Oh, after she’d told him about six times it was me, he suddenly seemed to take it in. At least he fell back in a chair with a great ‘Gosh!’—and sat

there staring as if he'd seen a whole regiment of bogies. So then I scrambled round the table as quick as I could and made for the door."

"And o'or Leesebeth?"

"That was the worst of it all. She looked so distressed I felt I must try to comfort her, so said never to mind and that I knew he wasn't himself.

"'But that it should be you, Miss Bethia,' she kept saying, 'I'm that mortified.'

"So of course I tried to assure her it didn't matter, and I knew he would be sorry when he came to himself, etc., etc. And what *do* you think was her answer? . . . 'Oh, I see, yer accustomed wi' the gentlemen yourself, Miss Bethia. I'm thinkin' they're aw alike when they've had a wee drappie.'

"Just as if Father, or any one we know was ever like that! . . . It's made me feel all smirched and grimy ever since."

"Yes, it was pretty awful. . . . But, really you know, B., you're rather hyper-particular."

"I don't think I'm at all hyper-anything. . . . But I do loathe drunks. . . . And I feel—well, as if I'd descended into the arena in real earnest. . . among all the dust and dirt . . . and filth. . . ."

"Shall you tell Mother?"

"No, what would be the good? It'll only worry her and not be any use . . . only I do wonder . . . Oh, lots of things. . . . Good-night, A."

And, with a valedictory wave of her hair-brush, she was gone.

CHAPTER XIII.

Notwithstanding her overnight decision, Bethia found herself next morning making full confession to her Mother. A night of little sleep, and much tossing, had brought, in the dawn, thoughts of a kind that had somewhat comforted Bethia and smoothed over the mood in which she had spoken to Alison. But Lady Maitland had had no such period of reflection. She was horrified—and, also, exceedingly angry.

“It was a preposterous suggestion from the first,” she declared. “Surely the last thing the Red Cross should do is recruiting. . . .”

“Yes—so poor Sergeant Nicol has discovered to his dismay. Mr. Patrick descended on him heavily and put a stop to it. Thank goodness!”

“I ought never to have allowed you to go.”

“It was rather a half-hearted allowing,” the daughter suggested, with a smile. But her mother was not to be turned aside by any smiles.

“I knew that I ought not. Yet—somehow—like a fool, I did. That wretched Binnie, too, of all people. . . I simply can’t bear to think of you exposed to such horrors.”

“It wasn’t pleasant certainly,” Bethia admitted, “and I hated it dreadfully. But I’m not sure, on reflection, that it may not do one good.”

“Good! How could it possibly?”

“That I can’t tell. . . I haven’t found out. I’ve only a feeling that—somehow—it might . . . though not, of course, necessarily to me. . . Surely, Mummie, if things come to one to do, one must believe—if there’s any sense or plan in anything—it’s because we’re meant to do them? And they’re to teach us what—for some reason—we’ve got to learn.”

“But not things like this. . .”

“Why not? Why pick and choose? It must surely be everything: as long, that is, as one is really and truly trying—wanting—to do what is right.”

“Not such experiences as that, B. . . Not when it means exposing you to such horrors. No, the whole thing is my fault. I ought to have forbidden your going.”

“Are you sure?” Bethia’s face looked unusually serious. “Why try to play special Providence to me, Mother mine? . . . Why not trust me to. . . to God?”

Amazement kept Lady Maitland silent several moments, then:

“It would be very difficult,” she said.

“What would be the good of it if it wasn’t?”

“I just can’t bear to have you even know of the ugly side to life . . . far less to meet it.”

“Yes, I know . . . like I’d feel with a child . . . but I’m not a child now. . . Besides I doubt if the hearing—or even the meeting—matters. There is something else that’s much bigger . . . Only I can’t explain what . . . for I haven’t learnt it myself. . . It’s like groping about in the dark . . . Every now

and then you catch hold of something that helps . . or a gleam of light shoots across . . and then it's all gone again and you're left. . . But I'm perfectly positive we'll know some day for sure . . and then we'll see that it was all—every bit of it, even Binnie—worth while, and of use. . . .”

She was interrupted by Fullarton throwing open the door and announcing :

“ Mr. MacCulloch, my lady.”

And in walked the old Minister, who—his greetings rather breathlessly made—plunged at once into the object of his unusually early visit.

“ I have looked in at this unauthorised hour,” he apologised, “ just to inform you, Lady Maitland—No, Miss Bethia, I beg of you do not absent yourself; for I have reason to believe you will be interested in the information which is the purport of my visit. Indeed, as my uncle the Sheriff Substitute, used to say, ‘ although not a principal you were, presumably, an accessory before the fact.’ ”

“ That sounds most alarming.”

“ Not at all, Miss Bethia, not at all. There is no call for anxiety I assure you. You will likely be aware, Lady Maitland,” he went on, speaking with his old-fashioned bow and that mixture of importance and deference he always assumes when speaking to ‘ her leddyship ’—“ that our poor friend Binnie, up at the Mains, is given at times to taking a glass more than is good for him ?”

“ Yes,” Lady Maitland admitted, with a glance at her daughter, “ I have heard so—quite lately.”

“ Ah,” his glance had followed hers, “ then you

and Miss Bethia, too,—for, though by no means in possession of full details, I gather she is the pivot on which the case turns—will be readily interested in what I have to tell. This morning—to cut a long story short—Binnie was with me as early as eight o'clock, in a state of mind I can only describe as well-nigh demented. And, from less to more, has done what no influence of mine—although conscientiously exerted for years—has been able to accomplish . . . and that is, he has—of his own free will and initiative—taken the pledge.”

“He hasn’t!”

The exclamation came simultaneously from both his hearers. And Mr. MacCulloch, with an expression almost of triumph, repeated :

“He has indeed, ladies. And that in the most serious and devout manner, and with a humbleness of spirit that, I must admit, I would never have looked for from him. . . I gather,” he went on, looking from one to the other interrogatively, “I gather the occurrence is in some way connected with Miss Bethia—though I am at a loss to conjecture how it can be so.”

“Tell him, B.,” said her mother.

So Bethia told—not without a certain difficulty, for some strange emotion more than once made speech difficult.

And as she went over the incidents once again it became more and more clear to her—and, in a lesser degree, to her mother—that the disagreeable experience that had seemed so regrettable had achieved a result which it now seemed more than likely had made it worth while.

When, therefore, at the end of the recital, Mr. MacCulloch—who had been standing with bent head, in an attitude of earnest attention,—raised his hand saying solemnly, “ And to the Lord’s name be praise ”; it was to his hearers only what they both felt to be the natural and fitting acknowledgment of a great and wonderful truth.

CHAPTER XIV.

It was not till some days later that Bethia told Mrs. Patrick—who for a whole week had been too suffering to see anyone—of what she laughingly called “The Conversion of Binnie.”

“It’s to be hoped,” she said, in that half-flippant tone we use to disguise the deeper feelings we are shy of acknowledging, “it won’t be a repetition of Father’s pet chestnut about the man who, having taken the pledge in Dundee, was found drunk in Edinburgh; and excused his lapse by declaring that that had been ‘a purely lockal affair.’”

“No, I expect better of Binnie than that. It was really very wonderful, wasn’t it, B., and resolves itself into a theory I’ve been evolving. . .”

“Which is. . .?”

“Nothing new. . . Only that it doesn’t ever matter—and can’t ever hurt—not real hurt, I mean,—as long as one is being and doing what one feels to be one’s best. . . I mean,” she added, getting a little involved, “one has just to do things and . . .”

“Of course,” Bethia responded with conviction, but entirely missing the trend of Mrs. Patrick’s remark—(or was it that she was in no mood for the homily towards which the conversation seemed veering?) “that’s what makes one so furious with the people who shirk and do nothing at all—though they talk as if they were everything they should

be—and pose as good patriots. Patriots indeed,—they don't understand what the word means."

"At what—or at whom—may one ask, is this diatribe directed? Not at my Pat, I do hope?"

"Good gracious, no! . . . How could you imagine I'd think of Mr. Patrick like that?"

"I didn't . . . but suppose you mean someone?"

"No . . . no one in particular. . . . At least, yes—I do. Why shouldn't I say so? . . . It makes me simply boil to think of that great lump of a Mr. John Clegg mouching about at home money-grubbing. He's a disgrace to his country—and so I've told him."

"You told him, B.! . . . What did you tell him?"

"Just what I think. Why shouldn't I, Mrs. Patrick? It is a disgrace. Only think of it! . . . At a time like this, that he—a great, strong, able-bodied young man—should be sitting at home in his father's office, thinking of nothing but filling his own pockets;—which, if one can believe what one hears, he is doing to some purpose. Why, it's despicable—disgusting. . . . Well, one thing is, I will never—never—speak to the man again. . . . He's not a man . . . he's a worm!"

"Did you tell him that also?"

"No, it wasn't necessary."

"I can well believe it wouldn't be necessary if you glared at him in at all the same way you are glaring at me."

"But, Mrs. Patrick, surely you feel as I do?" Bethia went on hotly, far too much in earnest to be turned aside from her "righteous wrath."

"To think of any man—for of course it's only of

consequence because he is a man, and every man's wanted just now,—funking and hiding in an office when he might be fighting for his country. . . It makes one quite sick. . . .”

“Isn't it possible he may be doing something of use in the office?”

“What could he be doing? No, he's just sitting there hiding—hiding from danger and piling up shekels. . . Oh, I've no patience with such people. . . .”

“And you really told him all that?”

“Yes, most of it. . . Not perhaps exactly in those words, for I wasn't so furious then. It was his calm unconcern—his indifference—that made me so rabid.” “Then he didn't mind what you said?”

“Not at all. . . I don't believe he's the least bit ashamed of himself. . . I couldn't have believed it possible if I hadn't seen it . . for, you see, . . don't laugh, Mrs. Pat, I . . I thought perhaps he hadn't realised what a despicable creature he is being and . . and that if I said something he . . he . . .”

“Would see and respond?” Mrs. Patrick suggested. “And he didn't? . . It must have been rather a trying interview . . for you both.”

“Oh, *I* didn't mind in the least,” Bethia assured her, “and certainly he didn't either. So I'd much better have kept my breath to cool my porridge, as Miss Rankin would say.” And, for the first time since launching headlong on the subject, Bethia's sense of humour came to the rescue, helping her to regain her usual balance.

“I suppose I am very silly,” she gave a little

sigh, "for, after all, what a John Clegg does, or does not do, is of no possible interest to me."

"Of course not," Mrs. Patrick agreed.

"All the same," and neither the animus of tone nor the flush rising hot to her cheek, escaped the notice of the woman who lay watching her with apparent indifference; "all the same I consider him a cad . . . and a thoroughly rotten outsider."

There was no need for any reply to this sweeping indictment; as, at that moment, Lady Maitland's entrance made an end to the conversation. And Bethia, declaring she was sure she wasn't wanted—and besides had lots of things she ought to be doing—took her departure.

"What was B. so vociferous about?" Lady Maitland inquired.

"Only abusing John Clegg, who she considers a shirker because he's not fighting."

"So he is—isn't he?"

"I don't know, but thought perhaps we might give him the benefit of the doubt."

"That's so like you, Mary. You've always got some excuse for everyone—except me, who you're invariably hard on."

"Oh, Effie, what a shame!"

Mrs. Patrick laughed, though inwardly questioning whether the charge was made altogether in fun.

"You don't mean that really," she went on, receiving no answer; "Effie—I almost believe you do."

"I almost believe it myself—sometimes. Yes, Mary," her voice was weary, almost peevish, "Yes, it's all very well for you, lying here quietly—well

out of the fume and fret of ordinary life. You, who have no children going through the horrors of war—not only abroad but at home—to be easy going and reasonable and forgiving and. . . and high-faluting. But I can tell you its very different for ‘ nous autres.’ ”

“ Of course. Do you think I don’t know it? . . . Only it wasn’t always so easy—indeed it isn’t always quite easy—even now.”

With quick compunction Lady Maitland became aware of the half-strangled sob, and exclaimed :

“ Oh don’t, Mary, don’t. . . I’m so sorry. . . I didn’t mean it. . . How could I be such a beast !”

“ You needn’t be sorry. . . You didn’t think. . . You aren’t. . . It’s. . . it’s I who am a fool.”

“ No, no, forgive me—please do—I can’t think how I could have said it.”

“ Why shouldn’t you say it? . . . It’s true. . . But, perhaps, if I were to tell you about—about myself. . . And how it all happened. . . and. . . and why . . . You would understand better, and”—trying to smile through her tears—“ not think me quite such an impossible prig.”

“ But I never thought you any such thing. . . ”

“ Yes, I know. . . only really you did. . . Yes. . . just a little bit, Effie,—sometimes.”

“ Well, I never will again, anyhow.”

And they left it at that.

“ You know,” Mary Patrick went on, after a moment, “ You know I was only B.’s age when it all happened. We look—or did look, for she is altering—growing—in the most marvellous way every day—on her as a baby, but I considered my-

self very grown up, I remember; and thought I knew all about everything at her age. No doubt I was much more on my own. I was a wild Irish girl, too, you see,—wilder, I daresay, than most. with no one much to help me after Father and Mother both died.”

“Poor Mary!”

“Things being one’s own fault doesn’t make it easier—does it?—or pleasanter,” Mrs. Patrick went on, “And it was my own fault for, after we married, I would go on hunting; and the only thing I had to ride—for even then we were very hard up—was a mare I had been warned again and again wasn’t safe. I’d never been fearfully strong, and she was always too much for me. . And. . this was the result. She, poor darling, was killed on the spot. . And I only escaped by a miracle. . . I used to wish I hadn’t. . Oh, how I wished it at first. . You see I was very young, and. . and. . ”

“Oh, Mary, how terrible. I had no idea. . ”

“No, I know. . for I can’t ever speak of it—even now—without making a fool of myself. . It isn’t, you see, as if it was only myself. . and having to lie here like a log all the time—though that did seem fearfully hard at first—but other things too. . The knowing we could never have any children,” again the catch in her voice revealed a heart-ache never before alluded to, “but Pat having to leave the Navy. . that was almost the worst of all—for it was as if I had spoilt his life—taking from him all he cared for most—and all through my own wretched selfishness. . . ”

“Oh, Mary, I’m sure it wasn’t that. You’re never selfish. . . .”

“Oh, yes, I am—often—very. . . .”

“If ye please, Mem,” announced Susan, suddenly bursting (it’s the only word to express her mode of entry) into the room, “Miss Cunningham is here and wishing to speak to ye.”

“What a bore.” They both murmured *sotto voce*, Mrs. Patrick quickly adding, as she perceived the trim little figure already in the door-way :

“Certainly, Susan—ask her to come in.”

“How do you do, Mrs. Patrick,—How do you do, Lady Maitland, I must apologise for disturbing you,” Mysie at once began, breathless and important,—“But I came to tell Mrs. Patrick—and am very glad to have the opportunity of explaining to Lady Maitland at the same time—about that Mrs. MacGregor at Gabb’s Corner. I went to take her the arrears of separation allowance, as arranged with you, Mrs. Patrick, last week—£3 it was, if you remember. And when I looked in this morning, what do you think?—I find she has spent the whole £3 on a scarlet cloth pelisse trimmed with white fur and big gold buttons for the Baby—so unsuitable. And she is so pleased with herself, and not the least ashamed of being so terribly thriftless. But she even had the impertinence to ask me for an advance for the rent—which is quite preposterous, as I am sure you, Lady Maitland, will agree. . . . And she was decidedly insolent when, as was only right, I pointed out to her her wicked extravagance—so unsuitable to one in her rank of life. Indeed, as I said to her, she was cheating the S. and S.F.A. and

making very serious trouble. . . ”

Thus Miss Mysie Cunningham for some ten minutes; till, somewhat soothed and readjusted, she took her departure.

“ I can only say,” declared Lady Maitland, as the door closed behind the upright little figure in irreproachable “morning costume,” “that had I been Mrs. MacGregor, I would certainly have been as insolent to her as I knew how—and hope that under the circumstances my vocabulary would have been considerable. I wonder you can have patience with them all, Mary.”

“ I haven’t! No one knows how I loathe and hate them at times. Yet what would I do lying here all day if it were not for them and their vagaries? Even when the pain comes on pretty badly I can always endure it if only someone has the consideration to come in with a bundle of humours, served up with the sauce piquante of their overwhelming belief in their own little bundle’s special importance. . . But to come back to ourselves—you haven’t given me any of your news. How is Sir Harry?”

“ Very cheery and apparently getting on splendidly. Up to his eyes in work and thoroughly enjoying it. Out at seven every morning and hard at it day and night—not bad for an old ‘dug-out,’ is it?”

“ How dare you call him such a thing!”

“ He’s proud of it. After all if one is antediluvian the only way to make it at all bearable is to be proud of it. By the way, I don’t think I told you rather a nice story he sent me—he doesn’t

vouch for the truth of it—about a man who wanted to enlist in the London Scottish. He was told he must either be of Scottish descent or have property in Scotland, to be eligible. He could not prove the descent but claimed to have property in Scotland. However, when brought to book, it was found to be only two pairs of trousers being dyed at Pullars! Personally I think he ought to have been enlisted—or given a commission—on that.”

“He certainly showed himself to be a man of resource.”

“All the same,” Effie went on, in a tone so dejected and unlike herself as to sadden her hearer, “I think Harry is getting a little fed up with the sameness and drudgery of life as lived under present conditions. He is simply pining to be in the thick of it all. . . But I suppose, from your point of view, Mary, it is developing our characters to wrestle with the dull and uninteresting as well as the low and sordid?”

Effie Maitland’s voice mocked, but underneath the mockery was a wistfulness that made it pathetic; and as Mary looked up at her and smiled, she laid a hand on her arm and went on: “Really and truly, I believe I want to feel like you do, Mary. Only I have an awful presentiment that I’m going to be made to. . . and. . . and I’m frightened.”

Mrs. Patrick took the hand that had nestled up to her and rubbed it gently against her own soft cheek.

“Tell me about the boys,” she said presently; “you have good news of them?”

“Yes, excellent as far as it goes. Jim is most

flourishing. They have so many hours off, now, to so many in the trenches—for which he is duly thankful, as the discomfort in this weather is something awful.”

“I should think so. Knee deep in mud and muffers, as someone said. By the way, had the ‘cakie,’ as Susan will call khaki, handkerchiefs arrived safe?”

“Yes, and he says ‘Isn’t it satisfactory to think of 800 noses that wanted to be blown being blown. . . Oh, and Mary, did I tell you about the Censor and the cascara?’”

“No, you told me Jim had asked you to send him a lot.”

“Well, I did. And when I got his answer, in which he said that since taking cascara they were all jubilant the Censor had carefully stroked out Cascara.”

“How lovely! It does sound absurdly like some of the weird names of the towns one hears of for the first time in the papers. By the bye, one of the soldier’s wives who came in to see me the other day took great pride in her husband’s letters being what she called *censured*. . . But go on, you proud mother—Tell me more. . . Is Ron better?”

“Yes, I had a long letter from him this morning.”

“Did he tell you how it all happened?”

“Yes, at last—now he isn’t coming home he did. He says his wound was nothing—but the lying alone, unable to move, for hours was. . . pretty awful. . . They carried him to a cellar and he was

left there for ever so long before they could get him away, hearing the din of the bombardment, and walls crashing down everywhere. . knowing that at any moment he might be blown to bits or buried alive. . . And Ron's so sensitive. . so imaginative. . he always was. . it must be worse for him than. . than for a good many others. But of course he doesn't say that. . only that after a few days in Hospital he is 'quite all right.' . so has refused the leave he was offered, and was going back in the trenches that day. . . . "

"How splendid! You must be proud of him."

Effie nodded.

"Of course his being wounded and in the cellar, and all that, he couldn't avoid. But one does like to feel he went back of his own choice—when he needn't have. Only. . . there's a bit of me that can't bear not having got just a glimpse of him after all he's been through. . And. . and, Mary. . I had such an awful feeling last night. . I woke in the night with it. . that . . that. . "

"You poor darling, it's very natural you should. But you must not let your mind dwell on it. . . You couldn't go on if you did. . And what would happen to us all then—and to all the wonderful organisations you shied away from so dreadfully at first? . . Bless you. . . "

She broke off abruptly and slightly raised her head, listening. . .

"What is it? . . Mary . . . Mary . . what is it? . . . "

"Nothing. . How nervous you are! . . It is

only Pat. . I heard his footstep on the gravel. . . What brings him home so early?"

As she spoke Mr. Patrick came in, saying in his usual cheery voice: "A telegram for you, Lady Maitland. . . They said you were here, so I just brought it along with me."

Both women had gone white, and, instinctively, Effie Maitland's hand sought Mrs. Patrick's, as she rose to her feet as though to face an enemy.

CHAPTER XV.

EXTRACT FROM MYSIE CUNINGHAM'S DIARY.

It's wonderful how well Lady Maitland keeps up. I was talking to dear Mamma about it only to-day, and she thinks it wonderful too. For, after all, it's only a little over a fortnight since we heard about poor Ronny; and there she is going about doing things just as usual. And so indeed they all are. Dear Mamma said she did hope it would put a stop to all that running into Kildree after Belgians and Wounded and so on. But it has not. Indeed it seems to me Alison and Bethia are there more than ever. Mamma says it is mere restlessness and what she calls "the present generation's insatiable love of excitement," and hopes I will never go on like that. But she need not be the least anxious, I have a great deal too much common sense—and too much self-respect, too, I hope,—to go making myself cheap; consorting with every sort of person, as they are doing. Why, I even saw Alison walking along the street with one of the common little clerks out of that office of their's the other day; and when I was trying to match some wool at Campbell's Elspeth Campbell herself told me that "Miss B.," as she called her, had had that flighty, vulgar-looking Christina Baird up to tea with her. I should think that Lady Maitland must have been rather surprised. I hope they won't expect me to do that sort of thing, or meet those sort of people, for I certainly shall not. Though it would be very

uncomfortable to have any unpleasantness with the Maitlands. We have known each other so long—besides his being a Baronet makes them first among the gentry—and quite county magnates of course.

But to go back to what I was going to say about Lady Maitland.

I went there this morning about the S. and S.F.A. as Mrs. Patrick is ill again. I sometimes wonder if she is not what the French call a “*malade imaginaire*?”

I daresay a great many of us would be like that if we were to give way as she does. But it is the fashion in Geesekirk to make a great fuss with Mary Patrick. (I do not call her Mary, as of course she is so much older than I, but Lady Maitland does; and she calls Lady Maitland “*Effie*,” which I must say I am surprised at). Dear Mamma says when the Patricks first came, no one thought very much of them, and she, for her part, never dreamed of being intimate, as no doubt they would have been only too glad to be; for dear Papa was alive then, and our house a great centre;—so I have often heard Mamma say—for I was too young to understand.

Papa was to have stood for Parliament—in the Radical interest of course, as he was a great one for progress—if he had not died quite suddenly of pneumonia. I often think how different things would have been, if God had not seen fit to take him. We would have gone up to London, and I would have been presented at Court, just as much as the Maitlands; and very likely he might even have got a title; people not nearly as good as us

have, Mamma says. Fancy if dear Mamma had gone in before Lady Maitland!—Wouldn't Alison and Bethia have been mad! But as it is, dear Mamma has never held up her head again. For a whole year she never crossed the doorstep. So different from the Maitlands—though of course Lady Maitland has never been a widow, yet. But at the Memorial Service for poor Ronnie they had no veils and wore hardly what I would call mourning at all; whereas dear Mamma still keeps to her weeds for Church, and a cap in the house always.

Anyone reading this will have some idea then of the shock it gave me to find Lady Maitland working in the garden, quite cheerful and like her usual self, when I went in the morning to tell her some of these women are being so tiresome again: wanting their rents paid and not a bit satisfied with the separation allowance, and all the wonderful things Lloyd George is doing for them. Fullarton, the old butler—(I wonder how he likes having only a table-maid, instead of two footmen, to help him now)—rather hesitated at first, but when I said it was on business about the Soldiers and Sailors, he said her ladyship was in the garden, and would I go out to her. So I went, and there she was—in such a mess—planting bulbs. I must say her face is rather drawn when you look close into it, and certainly she looks older.

“Oh, is that you, Mysie,” she called out, quite in her usual voice. “I'm putting in a lot more bulbs—to make it nice for the Germans when they come, you know!”

I cannot say I think that sort of joke—for I suppose it was meant for a joke,—in very good taste; so I said nothing, but began at once about Mrs. Wilson and Mrs. McKie. I was very surprised, I must say, when she said the Wilsons must have more money.

“But, Lady Maitland,” I explained, “it is ample for people like them. They are only in Graham’s Works, you know. Why should they have such an expensive house? It’s an absurd rent for them to pay.”

Which it is, for they are quite common, working people.

“Not if they could afford to pay it,” she insisted. “You see the sons were living at home and their wages, with what Wilson earns, made quite £6 a week; but now the two sons have enlisted there is much less. So how can they pay the rent?”

“They could give up the house and take two rooms,” I said at once, “that would be much more practical.”

And of course it would. But she was not a bit convinced, only asked what would happen then to all their nice furniture. As if one could stop to think of all these little details for each of them, at such a time as this, and so occupied as I am. Besides, I had not thought it at all nice furniture, and most unsuitable for them; and I was going to say so, when she went on:

“Thank you very much for telling me, Mysie, I’ll see about it.”

And then, as if I had nothing more to do with

it—and the Wilsons are in my own S. and S.F.A. District—she began telling me how funny the two Belgian gardeners they have taken on are, and laughing because one of them said he had more ‘courage’ than his friend, and though feeling ill had not sent for the Dr. as there were so many ‘good leaves’ in the garden. She seemed to think it was amusing, but it does not appear so to me.

Before I left, the Matron from the Maitland Alms Houses came in. One of them has been fitted up for the Belgians, and we all sent furniture to make it more comfortable. Dear Mamma contributed quite a nice lot of things we never use; including some enamel saucepans that she had put away because someone told her they chip off and give you appendicitis. And I sent three pictures from my own room. They have always hung there, but having now got nicer ones, I was really glad to get rid of them. Matron came to say the people were quite discontented and said they had expected something much better and what was she to do. It is a woman who is there—a sort of lady, I think—with her three children and a servant. Matron said they had expected a “jolly villa moobley” (that was just how she pronounced it) and thought the rooms were more like a Hospital—which was very ungrateful after all we had done to make it nice. Lady Maitland said she would ‘see about it.’ She always seems to say that. She was most pleasant and friendly (almost too much so *I* thought) to Matron, but when she went away, said to me: “Perhaps Matron’s French doesn’t carry her very far, and I believe ‘the Belgiums,’ as they

all will call them, have no English; so I daresay it's all a misunderstanding."

I do think it would have been better to have said that straight out to Matron, instead of smoothing her over and then finding fault behind her back. However, I suppose I am perhaps singular in my regard for absolute truth, even when it may not be very pleasant to those to whom I feel it is my duty to say it.

"Matron had hardly gone when the Belgian Madame herself arrived. It is so extraordinary the way they all come running in to Lady Maitland! It must be because she likes it, for no one would think of invading *our* house at all hours in that free and easy way. She—the Madame, I mean—was very excited at first; and, as far as I could make out, abusing everything. But she talked very fast and with such a peculiar accent, and so did Lady Maitland, that I found it difficult to follow them—though I nearly took a prize at Miss Gillespie's for French literature and was always the one to recite at the Prize-giving. So it could not be that I was wrong. One thing I am almost sure she complained of was the saucepans, which was absurd as they were almost new; but Lady Maitland quite favoured her, I could see, and sent for a thing they both called a 'Mar-meet,' to make soup in. I began to say something about not being the right thing but Madame called it something else, and Lady Maitland looked at me so queerly that I did not like to go on. Then Lady Maitland seemed to expect the Madame to carry round this 'Mar-meet' to the Alms' Houses. But she said she would send the servant; and

turned to me so nicely to say she was ‘*de très bonne famille*’—I quite caught that—and she was sure I would ‘*comprendre*’—which of course I did. And I do not wonder the poor thing did not want to be seen carrying a great pottery soup tureen—and such a common looking one too!—along the public road. Just as the Madame was explaining to me, I happened to catch Lady Maitland’s eye; and, if it was not that it seems impossible, I would have said she winked. Some people do have a sort of twitch in their eye, but I never noticed it in her before. Well, the end of it all was that Lady Maitland said she would carry the ‘*Mar-meet*’ herself, and I really believe she would have,—just as she was, all muddy in her short garden skirt, big sacking apron and thick boots, exactly like one of the field workers,—when who should appear most opportunely, I must say, but Mr. Patrick. And the ‘*Mar-meet*’ was given to him. But if he had not been there I feel convinced Lady Maitland would have gone. Only of course it would not have mattered so much for her, as every one knows who she is; and that makes a very great difference.

“Indeed I think all the Maitlands are most unconventional in their deep grief. Only yesterday I met Bethia in fits of laughter over what one of the farm men had just said. It seems he had been very anxious to enlist, and was dreadfully disappointed because the Dr. would not pass him on account of his teeth. “And it’s verra queer,” he had said to B., “for they’re the verra same Jock Jamieson had in yesterday, and they passed him aw’right.”

I do not think it is a very nice story. And I would not like to tell it myself, especially with the common accent B. put on—though I suppose some people might consider it droll. But what surprised me was the way B. laughed;—and so near the Lodge gates, too. Anyone passing would have thought it most peculiar, knowing the deep mourning they are in. But I do think the Maitlands *are* peculiar—almost as peculiar as the Patricks. whom we have always considered most eccentric.

Before I got home, and while these thoughts were occupying my mind, I again met Mr. Patrick and stopped and asked him, in the most friendly way, how he had enjoyed carrying the “mar-meet.” He said he did not mind at all, but I think he must have, really; for he was quite snappy, and said something I did not catch about me and socialism. And then went on as if he were blaming the Government, which was absurd; for, as I explained to him, it has been entirely Lady Maitland’s fault. But he would not listen, going on with his own subject and taking no notice of mine, in that tiresome way people have. He really seems to take a positive pleasure in saying rude things to me (I daresay because I speak up to him as some do not dare to) and is always disparaging our wonderful administration; which, considering what dear Papa’s political opinions were, and how much the Liberal party looked up to him, and that he would have been member for the Borough—and very likely a Peer—if he had only lived, is certainly very bad taste on his part. Indeed it makes me doubt whether Mr. Patrick—in spite of his great intimacy with the Maitlands—is really quite a gentleman.

CHAPTER XVI.

Lady Maitland returned to her work in the garden, but she knelt down to her planting feeling that the peace with which she had begun the morning had been rudely destroyed.

“Poisonous little beast,” she muttered, as she gave a vicious dig to the anemone hole she was making. “Why must she come poking her nasty weasel nose in here, making me feel all scratched up the wrong way, just when I don’t want to.”

And it was neither to the anxious little Matron nor the indignant “Belgian” that she was alluding. With an effort she turned her thoughts into other channels.

“Mary would say I must not let myself be so easily unbalanced—or over-balanced—or barged to one side. But I can’t help it—dear Mary, bless her. She is an angel. Only we can’t all be angels . . . though I am trying.” And she smiled to herself, rather ruefully admitting that her attitude of mind towards “the poisonous little beast” could hardly claim to be angelic.

Presently her thoughts took another turn. And, as one by one the bulbs were sorted out and found a resting place, meandered gently in the twilight where memory gives calm and peace.

She had awakened very early and all morning had been reading and re-reading, over and over again, the letters she had had from her boy.

Those scraps on odds and ends of paper which he had dotted down—a few words at a time—as they came to him. In the last of them, following some disjointed reminiscences of “the old days when everything was so different,”—days on which his mind had evidently been dwelling a great deal—was a sentence that kept repeating itself in her mind with curious insistence. “Perhaps,” he had written, “we’re really here to find out what are the things that don’t really matter. . . One jolly well changes one’s standards out here . . . I wish . . .”

Here the thread had been broken. His signature, hurriedly scrawled . . and scarcely legible, “Your Ron.” followed. That was all. . .

On first reading these sentences—the letter had arrived only the day before the telegram—his mother had smiled, as she wondered if Ronny was going to “get sentimental and take to writing poetry, as many of them seemed to be doing out there.” . . But now she regarded them differently . . for she knew they were the last words her boy would ever write to her . . his last message to his mother . . . “Are we perhaps here to find out what are the things that really don’t matter? . . And now . . ? Was it no more “perhaps”? . . Did he know? . . .

.
Her thoughts flew back to her Ronny as a tiny boy, hardly able to walk alone—staggering towards her with a pinafore full of leaf mould, that got nearly all strewn on the path before he—and it—were deposited in a heap at her feet. But what did that matter? He was just as proud to “he’p Mum

gah-den ” as she was to be helped by him. . . . She recalled him in many stages of his growth. . . . Still always eager to “help Mum,” not seldom to the undoing of what “Mum ” wanted done . . . But that had not disturbed her—as long as he did not hurt his precious self. And, smiling, she remembered his never failing : “ It’s all yight, Mummie—mum, I’s e not yeally hurted . . . truly, no I’s e not,”—even with the tears pouring down his cheeks—the moment he became aware of her anxiety.

There came back to her the memory of the day they had climbed the Chapel hill together, the first time that Ron. had gone to Church. It was a summer’s day. She recalled the feeling of his hot little hand in hers. . . . Suddenly he had seen a bright Red Admiral butterfly, had darted after it, slipped and fallen. His hands and knees were cut and bleeding . . . she seemed to see them now and to feel her horror at the sight . . . but he had not minded that. . . . Seeing his piteous face—and knowing her own sensations—she had thought he did, and had begun to try and comfort him, when—getting angry that she should so misunderstand—he had stamped his foot and cried : “ No, no, it isn’t that. I isn’t mindin’ that.—But won’t Dod mind me coming to His House all blug-gy ?” And how, to make quite sure, she had taken him to the vestry and he had been “made all c’ean ” before going into Church. . . . Where he had sung his favourite hymn in his shrill, young voice . . . not always quite in tune.

A robin, who had been watching her narrowly, perched on a rose bush near, began to pipe ; his

high, clear note so much like Ronny's had been then. . . It was like something else as well. . . . Yes, it was the distant wail of pipes, as she walked up that steep path . . only the other day. . . . And Ron. was dead . . killed . . too . . so horribly. . . . And lying . . who knew where. . . . And yet the world seemed such a peaceful kindly place. . . . The sun had shone as they had climbed the dear, familiar path, though down below the Loch and its enshrining hills were veiled in mist : a soft, grey, shroud-like mist. And as they came back, after the service that had been so sweetly sad, and singing Ronny's Hymn, a pale, pale moon had smiled, through the russet stems of the tall Scotch firs, upon the Loch that lay, a sheet of burnished flame, reflecting the crimson glory of a sky from whence the sun had only just disappeared behind great purple hills that watched and sheltered, day and night, the homes from which twinkling lights came merrily out, unconscious of anything but peace.

What a wonderful beautiful world it was. . . . And how Ronnie had loved it ! . . . Those hills . . the moor . . the Loch . . fishing . . shooting . . the long, hot August days . . the glamour of the summer nights . . the winter's snow . . the merry, foolish pranks . . his clear young voice calling her or shouting out some song . . the dear familiar whistle . . the boyish laughter . . and now . . now. . .

.
The holes she was making for the anemone bulbs swam in a mist of tears.
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As she buried the bulbs one by one and covered them out of sight, she thought how unbelievable it was that they should ever grow. Why did that dead-looking little brown thing become a beautiful flower? Why should burying it in the dark—in mud—result in anything so outrageously unlikely? How did it happen? Did the impulse to reach the light emanate from within? And why? Could it be because it wanted to? Her thoughts played with the fancy: turning it, looking at it from different points of view; wondering if deeper meanings really lay hidden within the ordinary facts of nature. If we thought so, would it change our—what was it Mr. Patrick had called it? “standards of values”? Would it make us really want to . . . reach the Light?

She looked round at the trees, the shrubs, the well-known garden, picturing it as it would be in the coming spring. . . . Telling herself that, because of that knowledge, the winter was no cruel tragedy—only a time of waiting in hope—more, in faith—in sure expectation.

Time-honoured words, familiar to her from childhood, but that had never been anything more to her than words, came crowding upon her memory; strangely entangled with Miss Rankin’s having said: “Whaten a like faith has Scotland the day? For I’m thinking it was not so much the trumpeting as the Faith that brought down the walls o’ Jericho wi’ such a fine strammash.”

But how could one feel differently? Was it

possible? Only by wanting to, Mary Patrick had said. . . Only by . . wanting to. . .

.
“ But I do want to, really,” she whispered to herself, “ I do—I do—”

.
A shaft of sunlight sent its soft bright gleam across the flower bed that, its short summer over, confidently awaited the coming spring. The robin, swaying on a thorny branch above her head, began his song again : the song that, with its wild, sweet trill, was like the wailing pipes and Ronny’s childish Hymn. And—almost as if his voice had really spoken to her—she seemed to hear the baby accents say : “ It’s all yight, Mummie-Mum, I isn’t yeally hurted . . truly, no I’se not.”

CHAPTER XVII.

In spite of—or is it perhaps on account of?—her scorn and disgust at his unpatriotic behaviour, Bethia Maitland's thoughts were much occupied with John Clegg. He was a problem. And as such he held a more prominent and predominant place in her mind than she was at all aware of. Making acquaintance, as she was now doing, with a number of people of all classes, whose existence had never until lately been of any account to her, she realised—not without surprise—that in his own way and his own circle (as Mysie would say) John Clegg was a person of considerable importance. The men at the Works liked and respected him, looking up to “the young Maister” as they had never done to him whom they somewhat contemptuously designated “the old 'un,” or simply “him.”

Why did they? Bethia wondered. What was there to admire and look up to in a young, strong and evidently capable man, who at a crisis like this thought only of money making? Yet they did think well of him. There was no getting away from that. Again and again incidents came to her knowledge, stories were related to her, undoubtedly proving there was grit—and a kind heart—in “the creature,” as she inwardly designated him. But that only angered her more. If he was what they believed him to be it was all the more infamous that, in this great world crisis, he should show

himself to be despicable, dishonourable, cowardly. (The epithets are of Bethia's choosing, not mine.) The more her thoughts dwelt on the subject—the more confirmation there was of the young Master's good qualities, and, in the most irritating way such confirmation was added to every day—the hotter waxed Bethia's indignation—her contempt. Those kind-hearted impulses and generous actions, which gained him so much kudos among the ignorant, could not deceive her. *She* recognised such subterfuges for what they were : his way of currying favour with the workpeople—a wily scheme for circumventing those “ beastly trades-unions.” Such institutions being held responsible—according to the code in which Bethia had been reared—for most uncomprehended anomalies.

Could anything be more ignoble than to use such methods—to trade on commercial power and gain labour's gratitude—by simulating virtues merely for the sake of self-aggrandisement—for greed.

Hurrying towards home and luncheon, Bethia revolved such thoughts in her mind, more prejudiced than ever by the contrast between “ money-grubbers ” living at ease and her own brothers, one of whom had already given his life for his country. Her own grief—her Mother's misery—made the situation so vivid, so poignant, that the praises heard that morning, to which she had obliged herself to listen in silence, had roused in her a positive fury of resentment against John Clegg : as representing, so she told herself, the antithesis of all she most loved, honoured—and now mourned.

So it happened that when, just as she was

passing Goudie the Baker's—and descried in the distance a tall figure which she at once recognised coming towards her, that—to her no small annoyance—her heart stopped all of a sudden and then beat with altogether unnecessary violence.

In what way should she meet him? . . . She would not meet him at all

Before she knew she was doing it, she had stopped and was gazing at the display of Shetland underclothing in Campbell's shop window, without, however, seeing anything.

Would he speak to her? . . . Would he pass by without any recognition?

In another moment the question was decided by a voice at her side uttering a pleasant, "Good morning, Miss Maitland."

For a moment she did not answer.

"Are you studying the latest cut in woolies?" he asked, laughing; "I know the interest my Mother takes in them now."

Evidently he was unconscious of the enormity of his crimes, or more probably hardened by them, and had no idea of her attitude towards them—and him.

But, quick to perceive something was the matter, and—which she somehow discovered, though persistently looking in the opposite direction—crimsoning to the roots of his hair, he drew himself up, stiff and straight.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Maitland. . . Perhaps you do not wish to speak to me?"

"No, I do not," she said, and lifting her eyes suddenly, looked him straight in the face.

For a longish moment the eyes of both remained fixed—neither yielding to the other. Then, pulling himself together with no inconsiderable effort, John Clegg raised his hat, and with a frigid, “I beg your pardon,” walked on.

She had done it. . . Yes, Bethia told herself proudly, she had certainly done it . . . absolutely . . . irretrievably. . . thoroughly. . . but did not, somehow, feel so entirely pleased with herself as she—surely—ought. For she was justified. . . She must be . . . then how could those grey eyes have looked into her’s so frankly? . . .

But that no doubt, if you are a thoroughgoing hypocrite, must be easy, and yet . . . and yet. . .

Nevertheless those eyes had made an impression.

It was with a sigh expressive of anything but self-satisfaction that Bethia proceeded on her way homewards.

Presently her not altogether pleasant reflections were interrupted by a well-known, and at the moment very welcomingly cordial greeting :

“Sakes alive ! And surely to goodness ! As we say in the vernacular, I am glad to see you, Miss B. Thank Heaven for you, and such limpid things as you, in the fret of this perplexing life !”

“Good gracious, Mr. Patrick, what is the matter ?”

“Several things. The last, quite a minor one, really, an interview I have just had with . . .”

“With whom ?”

“Well, never mind. Silence is golden, so they say ; I daresay I’ll plague my unfortunate Mary with the silver of my speech, but why poor you ?”

“ Why not? It does one good to have a boil over now and then. Besides ”—she glanced along the road to where, round the corner by the Gordon’s Head, a trim, upright little figure, with something in the assurance of its carriage that was unmistakable, even at that distance—“ you needn’t tell me who has been mosquito-ing you. I have had my own ordeal this morning already.”

“ And so has your poor mother.”

“ Oh, has she? I’m so sorry. I thought I had left her safe for a quiet morning with her bulbs. Really the way that little—reptile speaks to mother, and absolutely reproves her, nearly drives me mad.”

“ She doesn’t !”

“ She does. It’s really the limit. If only she wasn’t so perky !”

“ Ignorance, my dear, sheer ignorance, nothing else is responsible for that sort of cock-sure bounce. Her father was just such another; the most pernicious hog I ever met : a conceited, blustering, superficial ass, with just enough of a sort of pawky shrewdness to enable him to impose on honest folk. And a damn radical of course. Wanted to stand for the Borough too, confound his cheek. But though our politics are not as sound as I could wish, we do know a gentleman—thanks to your father—in Geesekirk at any rate, if not in Kildree, and he’d never have had the ghost of a chance—at least I hope not !”

“ And poor Mysie speaks of him with bated breath, as if the world had sustained an irreparable loss by his having been ‘ cut off,’ as she would say.”

“Let her—by all means let her. That there should be anything in the heavens above, or the earth beneath, or the waters under the earth, to which she deigns to look up may be the saving of her yet. But I doubt it—I doubt it.”

“Poor Mysie! I don’t suppose she means to be the—the little terror she certainly sometimes is. I suppose she has never had the chance of being different.”

“Would anything ever effect that india-rubber hide? And as to chance, why, Säckerts Tanstücker!—don’t be alarmed, it’s only Swedish for safety matches, and an immense relief to my feelings—has she not known, for years, your Mother and . . . my Wife!”

“After that I have nothing more to say!”

“I should hope not, indeed. It all goes into that, doesn’t it? Do you know, Miss B. (B. for Blue-eyes, you know) it’s very refreshing for an old fogie like me, who sometimes goes burrowing along in the dark for days, in his own dull moleish way, to come up to the top now and then and. . .”

“And have a real good swear!” interrupted B. laughing merrily. “It sounds to me much more like a submarine than a mole. I think I will call you the Submarine in future.—May I?”

“You may call me any mortal thing you please, my dear, if you’ll only laugh like that—with those sea-coloured eyes, just like your mother’s, dancing and sparkling as they do.”

“Mother,” her face had suddenly grown grave; “I wish her eyes did sparkle. You can’t think how sad it is to see her when she thinks we’re

not looking. Though I'm not sure it isn't even sadder when she knows we are, and is trying to be brave. I sometimes think then I wish she wasn't brave."

"No, no, you mustn't say that. It would never do if we did not each play our little tragedy-comedy, to deceive the other . . . who is so seldom really deceived! Like my Mary and me. She plays up that she's not in pain. And I, knowing perfectly that she is, pretend that I don't, so that she may be able to play up better. Just as when I make believe I don't regret not being in the North Sea now, I haven't a doubt she is not a bit more taken in by me than I am by her. Yet we both play our part as well as we can—only of course she plays her's a damn sight better than I do mine. Bless her!"

"Yes, she's wonderful. What would any of us do without her?"

"I don't know about anyone else but I'd never have been a ha'porth of good without her. I'm not much as it is, I daresay, but anyway I'm not such a good-for-nothing hulk as I was before she took me in hand."

A strange muttering, which B. took to be oaths of affirmation, possibly in Swedish, continued to rumble in his throat after he had ceased speaking.

"What o'clock is it?" she asked suddenly.

"My old repeater has gone into dock, but the inward monitor tells me it must be getting near luncheon time. Ah, I thought you would soon tire of the old sub-marine and relegate him to obscurity."

“It isn’t that a bit. I would love to stay talking to you for ages—especially to-day, for I was feeling quite out of conceit with myself when we met, and you’ve reinstated me,” she assured him laughing. “No, truly, I must go because I don’t want Mother to find herself alone at luncheon and Alison is out.”

“Of course not.” Well we’ve got to get back to our trenches, Miss B., and play the game.”

He spoke oddly and looked so unlike his usual cheery self, that on a sudden impulse Bethia said: “Don’t let’s play it always, Mr. Patrick. Hide and seek in the dark is all very well sometimes, but don’t you think it would be silly always to do it?”

“Silly! It would be simply idiotic,” his loud laugh rang out boisterously. “Can’t you see us—blind to each other’s code signalling all the time? Why what’s the matter? You’re not annoyed with me?”

“No, no, not the least, only,” lowering her voice confidentially, “I had not noticed we had stopped right in front of the Cuninghams’ house, and I’m almost sure I saw Mysie’s face at the chink of the blind.”

“What is she doing? Spying? Let’s give her something to exercise her talents on.”

And raising his voice he poured out a flood of words, beginning with a solemn warning that they were strictly in confidence.

“Indeed, Miss B., I am much relieved to have been able to have this quiet talk with you alone. . . Let it be a secret between you and the old Submarine. He won’t forget your flash-light warnings

—nor must you his code. . . But above all things . . keep it dark.” And with finger on lip, in the most approved melodramatic style, he shook hands and departed.

Mysie Cuninghame, watching eagerly from behind the curtain, marked the gesture, and, as will be seen later, “drew her own conclusions.”

CHAPTER XVIII.

“It’s no use, Mary. She began running down Lady Maitland—now of all times, when one holds one’s breath and thinks of angels as those blue eyes look into yours—and being so catish that it’s the mercy of Providence I didn’t there and then smite her. . . .”

“Hip and thigh, like the Philistines,” interjected his wife.”

“I’m not particular as to the spot, but by. . . . Ahem—Moses let’s say—I wish I had felled her to the earth, especially now that I know she was peeping behind that blind—confound her.”

“Why Moses?—Moses was a meek man.”

“So am I—at times—as no one knows better than you, my Mary; but he slew the Amalekite, and by George, I’d like to slay that little, smirking, self-righteous skunk. Phew! I hate the sight of her.”

“She’s very young, Pat,—Give her time. Perhaps she’ll improve.”

“That’s what that dear B. said—or rather suggested—for I notice you are both of you fairly faint-hearted. But, no, Mary, she won’t. I hold with your theories up to a point, but you must not try to push them too far. I’m quite ready to grant you the Good God created sunshine, and honey, and cherry-pie, and dogs, and plum-duff, and snow-drops. . and YOU. . but He also created fog and

wasps, and cobras, and earwigs, and cats, and bad smells. . and Mysie Cunningham; and nothing even you can say—or do—will make me believe they are the same—or that I'll ever love the one as I I do the other. . . so there!"

And stooping down, his great, red, sunburnt face,—with its twinkling grey eyes, looking out from it like beacons from a weather beaten tower—to the fragile shadow on the sofa, he kissed her more gently than one could have thought it possible for him to do anything, as he breathed a "Bless you, little snowdrop wife," in her ear.

"And now, Mary, I'm going to tell you something that should buck us both up immensely."

"Are you? How nice."

"Well, to begin at the beginning, I went into Glasgow, as you know, yesterday."

She nodded. "Yes, to get your hair cut."

"That was the official reason given, and I did have it cut—but the inner and primary cause was a letter I had had from the Admiralty. . "

"You didn't tell me!"

"No, I did not, for you see. . ."

"But Pat, really and truly, I'll be all right if you go. I can get on ever so much better now, and. . "

"Now Mary, don't incriminate yourself; for I warn you all this may be remembered and used in evidence against you. Wait till you hear the end. The beginning is, that they've offered me a post—and a tip-top one too—considering how rusty I must be."

"Oh, how splendid! I *am* so glad."

But he held up his hand with a gesture that abruptly checked her enthusiasm.

"I am very glad too, for it is flattering to one's vanity. But, for some time back, I've wondered a little about my eyes, and from less to more. I saw the oculist yesterday, and he says it is cataract!"

"Cataract!"

"My dear, it is nothing. A slight operation—a few days in a dark room—and all is well. But what we have—both of us—got to be thankful for is that now it can no longer—as has sometimes been darkly hinted to me—be on account of a delicate wife that I am cumbering the home shelf, but because. . . "

"Pat—I can't bear to think that you—you—who live so much by seeing and doing should . . . should. . . "

"Yes, it's a bit of a bore, isn't it, little woman. . . So much so that I had made up my mind not to tell you, till I met B. Maitland just now; and something she said to me made me unmake it. Far better, isn't it, to face our troubles together than to play hide-and-seek blind fold for fear of hurting each other; and so risk all sorts of unexpected, and probably unnecessary, jars. As Miss Rankin says, 'the wurst may be tholed when it's kenned.' It's good to know they wanted me, and have offered it me, and not entirely bad—is it?—that you're not going to get rid of me after all."

CHAPTER XIX.

EXTRACT FROM MYSIE CUNINGHAM'S DIARY.

I have already set down in this Diary that Mamma and I have always considered there was something strange in connection with Mr. Patrick's retirement from the Navy, in which he is believed to have been. And I see I have also noted that Adeline and I expressed our conviction—and this I may add quite at the commencement of the War—that his not being employed by the Admiralty in this crisis was peculiar : indeed, I find on reference, that I even used the word suspicious ! But with no idea how near I was to the Truth. For I am sure no one could ever have imagined anything so astounding as what has now happened. At least it has not quite happened (or at any rate I cannot be perfectly certain it has), but fear very much it is happening.

Perhaps it would be well to try to put down, calmly and clearly, the appalling discovery which I have—quite inadvertently—made ; and which I have not yet mentioned to dear Mamma, for fear of upsetting her : as it certainly would. But it is extremely difficult to be calm when such an awful contingency is, so to speak, flickering before one : just as the light did last night !

But I have not yet come to the lights in my narrative ; and must now attempt to make a proper commencement.

I do not often—indeed I do not know when I

have done it before, which makes it all the more remarkable,—unclose my curtains after they are drawn for the night; but last night I felt a wish to do so. It was, indeed, as if I was impelled to what was a most unusual proceeding. It may have been as late as eleven—or it may have been even later—for I had been engaged with some correspondence of importance, with regard to the S. and S.F.A.), when, as I drew up the blind, and looked out, I became aware, in the stillness of the night, of lights in the sky. It was in the direction of the Patricks' house, but far beyond it: on the horizon in fact. First I saw these mysterious lights come and go in the sky: sometimes very far away, sometimes nearer, as though they swept the heavens. Then, in answer to them no doubt, a light flashed several times in succession from the Patricks' house; and, indeed, as I believe, from the window of Mr. Patrick's own room as well as from the shrubbery outside it. This continued for some time, and then all was again in darkness.

It may seem peculiar that I should know which is Mr. Patrick's room; so I must explain that he had a bay window built out from it only a short time ago, and we all spoke of it. And now that I think of it (which I had not done before) he happened to mention in my hearing that, from that very window—he used some peculiar nautical word in describing it—he can “get a whiff of the salt breeze and, on clear days, a glimpse of the sea.”

So why not on clear nights?

It is very shocking indeed to think a man who has been in our midst for so long may be in

collusion with the enemy. But we must remember, as the papers impress on us every day, it is only what we must expect. Someone—it may have been in the “Daily Mail” that I saw it—said that, in War Time, our foes will be those of our own household, and though Mr. Patrick is not of our own household, he is a great deal too near to be pleasant.

I wonder what steps I ought to take, and feel terribly anxious and unsettled. Also I cannot make up my mind whether to tell Adeline or not. Sometimes I wonder if she is a very good confidante for me. And I believe I would prefer Gwyneth Seaton-Swinton. But a confidante is a difficult thing to change.

In the meantime (as I have already found how much writing something down increases its importance) it is, I think, advisable again to make a tabulated list of the facts in order of their occurrence: matters being even more serious than I apprehended. And, also, there are more of them.

Altogether, putting the former together with what I discovered, quite by chance as it happened, last night; I feel convinced I have made a really important discovery.

*Revised and Tabulated List of Suspicious Facts
regarding Mr. Patrick.*

1. His having left the Navy under (as is believed) a Cloud.
2. His evident wish to conceal the passing of the Russians through Scotland.

3. Some words of a very remarkable conversation—overheard by Me—between him and Bethia Maitland, as I was arranging the curtains in the Dining-room and closing the window.
4. The flashing of Lights (in reply to other Lights) from the window of his own room and from outside it: especially in connection with his having, quite lately, built on a bay window to that room (which the papers have warned us, again and again, is how Germans and their Secret Agents are acting all over Great Britain.)
5. (Which I have only just recollected.) His peculiar foreign way of pronouncing the letter R.

N.B. Can Mr. Patrick be of German origin and
A SPY?

CHAPTER XX.

It was in November that Jim came home wounded.

Sir Harry and Lady Maitland met in London to welcome their boy, and she remained to see him comfortably established in the Hospital in Hill Street, where everything that kindness and forethought could suggest was being done for those to whom we owe our existence as a nation, as well as our hope to uphold the cause of truth and integrity.

On her return Lady Maitland was not very communicative about Jim, declaring him to be 'extraordinarily little changed and getting on splendidly.' Bethia gathered that her mother had felt she was not wanted.

"Don't bother about me, Mother," he had said, "I'm all right here—and would rather come home alone."

That was why Bethia had been advised not to meet him at the station, as she had wanted to do.

"He seems to hate any fuss," the mother warned her. And if she felt rather hurt by her son's attitude towards her, she did not say so, but accepted it in silence.

It was on a frosty morning, when the hills wore a mantle of white and trees and bushes were all a-sparkle in the early sunshine, that the motor deposited Jim Maitland at the door of the dear old home that—almost to his horror—looked so exactly the same.

And possibly, at the first glance, he did not appear much altered either. Excepting that his arm was in a sling and that he walked haltingly, it might have been one of the many well-remembered returns for the holidays—or after a few days' absence on shooting visits &c. His greeting of Fullarton, too, and the old man's reply, were identical."

"Hullo, Fully. Are you all right?"

"Yes, Master James, thank you, Sir."

"Everyone all right?"

"H'all well. A'hu-a'hem. How are you, Sir?"

"Oh, I'm all right. Just be careful with that coat. My arm's a bit dicky. . And tell. . Oh. . "

He stopped short as his eye fell on the trim parlourmaid, standing in the place of Albert and Thomas, and the sentence finished with, "Never mind, I'll manage myself."

"No, Master James. Not at all, sir. I intend to—A'hu-a'hem—valet you myself, sir."

"Thanks awfully, Fully, but don't you trouble."

"I should esteem it a privilege, sir."

"Oh, all right then. Do you think you'll be able to tackle the bandages?"

"Miss Bethia is, I believe, thoroughly—A'hu-a'hem—competent, and, I am led to understand, contemplating. . . "

But at that moment a vision—blue dressing-gowned, enveloped in a cloud of fair hair—flew down the great staircase, and with a cry of "Oh, Jim, Jim," Bethia threw her arms round her brother.

Upon which Fullarton, signalling peremptorily

to the parlourmaid gazing in round eyed absorption, discreetly withdrew, ushering his reluctant satellite out of the swing door before him.

It was all so exactly the same—yet so utterly different.

And that note, in all its petty detail and vast magnitude, pervaded everything, bewildering those who in vain strove to free themselves from its numbing influence, and above all freezing into silence the one who had returned to this former state of existence from what he thought of as Hell.

Jim had never been expansive like Ronny. Now he was less so than ever. The school-boyish manner, once so natural a covering to inwardness only dimly realised as existing, was now worn as a cloak to conceal that that inwardness had become existence itself. And the effect was—as his women folk found—extraordinarily defeating. They had expected a Jim aged and altered by the experiences through which he had passed—altered as they had altered, only in proportion to his far more drastic experiences, far more drastically. Instead they were confronted by a Jim of whom Bethia's description of "he's the same only he's not," comes as near to an explanation as one can get.

It would have been so different if it had been Ronny, was the mother's inward thought, unconsciously touching the very root of the matter—a root the planting of which was of her own doing. For Jim was only too well aware that his brother had always meant far more to 'the Mother' than he did. And his consequent compunction at being "the one to come back instead of Ron, who," as he

dismally told himself, "of course everyone wanted," was poignant to the point of morbidity. So much so that he descried at every turn signs of what—though undoubtedly existing—was by no means the mountain that he made of it.

Alison was the only one unaware of the shadow oppressing the rest of the family. And, sensing this intuitively, Jim talked to her more freely than to anyone else, thereby hurting Bethia—who had always been his own special pal—to a degree that was almost unbearable.

As ever, both she and her mother found an outlet for feelings carefully stifled at home, in their talks with Mrs. Patrick.

Yet even with Mrs. Patrick Lady Maitland was reticent, for her boys had always been very near her heart, and she hated to admit, even to herself, that confidence between them was not always complete. But once, in a sudden, irrepressible out-burst, she spoke of Jim admitting :

"He doesn't say anything. . . ever. . . at all."

"Effie, darling, have patience," Mary Patrick had answered. "How can the poor boy? The horror and misery of it all have frozen him dumb."

"I know. . . It must be frightful out there . . . but if it had been Ronny he'd have spoken."

"Are you sure that Jim doesn't feel that you think that?"

"Mary, what a hideous idea. . . What do you take me for? Never have I let him—either of them—have the smallest idea that I felt any difference."

"You thought so of course . . . but . . ."

“How can you suggest such a thing. Always . . always . . I’ve been exactly the same to both. Jim could never have guessed.”

“Yes, one believes that—but is it possible to help . . .”

“Do you know, Mary, sometimes I positively hate you.”

“I daresay. But not anything like as much as I sometimes hate myself.”

Laughing it off, she changed the subject—for what was the use of pursuing it?

Bethia, on the other hand, quite frankly and freely poured out her grief at the change, openly deploring it.

“Jim used to be always my chum,” she mourned. “and talked to me lots. But now when I ask him anything, or say anything—anything about these last months, I mean—he just shoves me off with a gruff: ‘Oh, it was all right.’ As if it could have been—or as if I could imagine it was. Or else he says: ‘Don’t you worry your head’—like when he first went to school and I asked if horrid things happened and whether it was true you got bullied. I hated being put off then—and I hate it still more now. Even about what we’re doing here,” she went on sadly, “he’s horribly chilling . . doesn’t seem to like my going to the Hospital or A. doing Belgians. In fact, I feel douched with cold water and wrapped in wet blankets whenever I try to do anything but ‘rot’ as we used to do. It’s all so . . so hopeless. As if he wanted to go back to bricks and the Nursery. But one can’t do that—can one, Mrs. Patrick? I don’t understand it—do you?”

“Just a little—perhaps. But of course I don’t know.”

“If only he’d come and see you. I wanted him to come with me to-day—but he wouldn’t . . preferred to go out alone.”

Bethia’s sigh was very dejected, but Mrs. Patrick made no answer—no suggestion. She had thought so much of the merry, careless boy who had left them in August. And of this his home-coming, in the place of his brother . . and, somehow, she could not quite manage to speak.

“You see,” Bethia went on dolefully, “when he won’t be anything but the Jim he used to be, it makes it so impossible—for he knows he’s not . . and so do I.”

“How could he be?”

“I know. And it’s a sort of insult to imagine any of us could. . . I do wish he’d come and see you though.”

“Don’t ask him to. Perhaps he will of himself. And if he doesn’t want to it would be no use even if he did come.”

“How do you mean, no use?”

“Is it ever any use doing anything unless you’re heart’s really in it? . . Or asking for anything unless you really want it? If he feels he wants to he’ll come. . . If not it’ll be because he doesn’t want me, and it would be of no use if he did.”

“What an uncomfortable doctrine. It sounds horrid.”

“Oh, but it’s not . . not a bit.”

“Then I don’t understand.”

“And I don’t know that I can explain. . . But

can't you see that the only really good thing—the only thing that is any good—is to be wanted—needed? Nothing matters but that. And if you're not needed it's because you're not what you're meant to be. If you were you would always be needed. And—don't you see?—if you are not what you are wanted—needed—to be, you must go on till you are. Nothing else is of any use. How can it be? And it is—as you say—a sort of insult to make believe it is.”

“ I am afraid I don't see. . . Or at least I've only caught a glimmer. Tell me more. Explain it somehow.”

“ Well, suppose you had children. . . You would not expect them—you would not want them—to come to you unless they wanted to themselves. *You* wouldn't, B., because you have got as far as not caring most about outside things. The minute you've begun to understand and care for the inside ones the outside cease to matter. At least not in comparison.”

“ I suppose,” Bethia hazarded, “ it's like the man—or was it a woman?—who discovered the goodly pearl, and sold all that she—or was it he?—possessed so as to be able to get it.”

“ Yes, you change all your standards of values. If you put it as I was beginning to do, as if it was your children, you'll see how I mean.—Though I'm an awful fool at explaining myself really. What satisfaction would it be to you for your children only to come to you because they thought you expected them to—and make you little set speeches because they imagined it would please you, or that

they might get something by it?—It would mean nothing at all to you. . . .”

“Indeed it would mean a great deal. It would mean I’d jolly well kick the little sneaks. How can you think of anything so hopelessly disgusting and impossible?”

“I believe it used to satisfy our ancestors. Anyway, they attached immense importance to the bow and the curtsy. And I’m told the Germans do now.”

“Thank Goodness I’m no German.”

“You’ve got beyond that—further on.”

“Than a German! I should hope so.”

Mrs. Patrick laughed at Bethia’s face of disgust. Then went on absorbed in the subject that so enthralled her.

“But it means so much more than that, if one can only see it. . . . And, Oh, B. . . . You are so near seeing.”

“Seeing what?”

“The real Big Meaning of things that, once you’ve got hold of even a strand of the rope, gives a clue to the whole puzzle of life.”

Her eyes shone with so strange a light that Bethia, unaccountably thrilled and attracted, said: “But do go on—tell me more.”

“I can’t tell you—not really. . . . You must look for it and want it yourself . . . want it most awfully. And then—it comes.”

“But to go back to my children,” Bethia went on, after a moment’s pause, “I haven’t understood about them yet.”

“And they are, I think, the easiest way,—at least

it seems so to me. But what were we saying?"

"How I'd smack them if they came to me with their bows and their curtsies and their little set speeches. And I would."

"Only because for you the inside matters more than the outside. And so you want the real inside them. Nothing else is any use to you. But you can't have it from them unless you're the real thing that they need."

"But how can one be?"

"That's for you to find out. . . It means sacrifice. I know it means that. . . It means something of yourself—a giving of yourself away. . . And it's horribly difficult."

Bethia's mind is quick and receptive. Her intuition has not yet been spoilt by misuse. After a moment's pause she said with a gasp: "Is that the meaning of—of all those things in the Bible?"

"I think so. We've got to work out our own details ourselves . . and be our own willing sacrifice . . But I believe that's the meaning."

"Then that—the thing we want our children to be to us—is what God wants us to be to Him?"

"It seems so to me. I think we are here to learn how to be of use to God. . how to help Him."

"Good Gracious. We've got a lot to learn before we'd be any use at that. Why most—if not all—of us, if we had got anything to do with it, would be making all sorts of earthquakes and hurricanes. . ."

Bethia paused, her eyes growing thoughtful,—her face expectant.

Was she awaiting the dawn?

Mrs. Patrick watched her. A sense of the mighty issues of moments holding her spell bound.

Then, as we see the first ray of light shoot suddenly across a landscape—(I have seen it awaken the desert)—illumination came.

“Do you think”—the girlish face was awestruck —“do you mean God wants us like that? That He is longing to gather us as a hen gathers her chickens—and we will not . . . And this. . . this ghastly war is that. . . that we may learn that the wings are our only safety? . . .

“Perhaps . . . I am wondering. . . .”

“And it means, too,” Bethia went on, more and more light breaking in on her, “It means that we treat Him as we would hate to be treated by our children. . . And never think how we must be hurting Him. . . Oh, isn’t it terrible—appalling—How can we. . . . And . . . and how can He bear it? . . .”

Bethia hid her face in Mary Patrick’s lap and sobbed like a child. And Mrs. Patrick made no attempt to console her.

Presently she looked up again, smiling through her tears.

“Isn’t it just like us?” she said, “to be silly and cry over it, when it must be—when it can only be—that it’s all coming right in the end. Only we’re too short sighted or even blind—and too stupid—to trust Him, when we can’t see for ourselves?”

“Yes,” Mrs. Patrick agreed. And again Bethia was aware of what she calls the ‘far-away look on her face and the sunshine of the April-day smile

that lit it up. “ Yes, I expect it’s as dear old Miss Rankin declared the other day, getting rather scathing over the fuss we are making about socks, so that no one seems able to sit for five minutes idle—and even proposed taking their knitting to Church. When that was suggested in her hearing she turned upon them in that fierce way she has . . .”

“ I know—just like a Bible ancient prophet. . .”

“ Exactly. And said : “ I’m just deaved with this incessant talk of thae woolies—like as if that was all there is to the war. . I’m thinking it’s the knitting of us aw thegither into a Gairment useful to the Lord that’s wanted. . Mebbe—could we but follow it up—there’s a sort o’ analogy in tilt’t, like there is in most everything. . Ay, ay, there’s mony a dropped stitch—and mony a rha-velled skein, but for aw’ that and aw’ that the Gairment’ll get woven one day. . And ye can wurrk fine at that Gairment in the Kirk—gin ye’re rightly minded so to do.”

CHAPTER XXI.

"You are coming, Jim, aren't you?" said B.

"Must I?" he answered, with a stretch and a yawn suggestive of anything but anxiety to move.

"She'll be awfully disappointed if you don't."

"Why should she?—I don't even know her."

Not in the least disconcerted by the incontestability of his reply, B. calmly shifted her ground, changing front with truly feminine mobility.

"She would be such a joy to you. It makes one laugh to see her, let alone hear her speak."

"You've given me plenty of capital imitations, with which I'm content."

"But truly, Jim, they're nothing to the original. I'm simply dying for you to meet that."

"Which means that I'm to go to amuse you."

"What a beast you are! Well, put it like that if you like . . . as long as you come."

"Well, I suppose needs must."

And, heaving himself out of the huge chair drawn up to the smoking-room fire, and throwing away the end of his cigarette with an exaggerated air of reluctance, he went.

Half-an-hour later, hearing the whole-hearted mirth of his laughter, B. rejoiced that, as she said to herself, she had "been firm."

It was a merry party that sat round the old-fashioned polished mahogany table, with its lovely

Spode tea-service set out on horrible crochet mats, in Miss Rankin's parlour; and Miss Rankin was the merriest.

"Ye'll be a proud woman this day," Janet had said to her, as she assisted to set the table, in the morning.

"No more than yourself, Janet," her mistress had retorted. But, later, as she looked at the guests seated round her table, she knew herself to be even prouder than Janet, whose face shone over the compliments showered on her dropped scones and short-bread, her cakes and her "jeels."

But there came a sudden eclipse to her beaming.

"Are ye daft, Janet," Miss Rankin suddenly addressed her, "not to be handing round the bun?"

"It's you that's daft yersel', Mem," was Janet's reply, uttered as if it was the most conventional answer of servant to mistress, "d'ye know what ye did wi' it?"

"What would I be doing with it?" was the ambiguous answer.

"I canna say what ye would be doin', but I know what ye did—an' that wuz to pit it somewheres I canna lay my hand on it."

"Hoots, woman, ye're ay a grand seeker but an ill finder. It'll likely be where the Hielandman found the tongs. . and that was in their right place."

"A t'weel, I'm no sayin' it winna, for the right place for the tongs is the grate an' the bun'll as likely be there as ony ither place wi' aw the stramashin' there's bin i' this hoose the day."

And Janet left the room in high dudgeon, shut-

ting the door behind her with a decided bang.

"She'll have taken the dorts at my faulting her before company," explained her mistress, "she's often affronted and huffed, but I never notice her; and Miss Bethia, there, who enjoys all my queery-weery ways'll enjoy that too. Ye see, Mr. James, yer sister takes me for a harmless loonie—or will it be a helpless natural?—and has made a packt with me that I'm aye to be at my wurst when she's near by. I can speak English quite well, you know, really," she went on, suddenly dropping her broad accent, "but she disapproves of it."

"Yes, indeed I do! *Please*, Miss Rankin, you mustn't. It would spoil everything."

"Well, I confess to ye, I feel more myself when I let my tongue run its native road. There's a fuishionless sort o' taste to the English. It's to me like the man said raw oysters wuz to him: Naething better than slithery fushionless glaur."

"That't delightful," cried B. "How I love your Scotch."

"Oh, well, ye'll get plenty."

"And, Miss Rankin," added Jim, "B. says you know all the Nursery rhymes our Nannie used to tell us."

"Yes, and I promised him a real Nursery afternoon of them—as you promised me. We can never quite remember them all."

"No," chimed in Alison, "we can only achieve scraps."

"I'll do that," Miss Rankin agreed nothing loath; "if yer through with yer tea we'll draw in our chairs and have a cosy symposium. I'll cry

on Janet to clear away. . . Janet. . . Are ye there, Janet? I'm thinkin'," she explained, "she's still got the black dog on her back!"

"That's one of Nannie's sayings," exclaimed Alison in delight. . . Don't you remember, Jim?"

"Don't I! And my annoyance because I could never see the black dog. I used always to hope—with a thrilling sort of terror—to catch sight of him, either on your back or my own!"

Miss Rankin, in the meantime, with a fervent "Drat the woman, she's reel countermacious," had disappeared into the back regions—or, as she would phrase it, ben the hoose—whence her voice was heard in voluble expostulation on the unseemliness of conduct that brought the establishment discredit in the eyes of the rest of the world, winding up with the reproof: "for ye ken weel, Janet, that it's an ill bur-rd that files its ain nest."

"Would ye care to come through and see Zedekiah Rankin?" she asked on her return; "I thought he was better in the kitchen the day, as he whiles gets screechin' at strangers."

"So I've heard," said Alison politely, as they followed her "through."

"Hur-rd," echoed Miss Rankin, "ye'd hear the scraich o' him frae here to Timbuctoo! But he's fond o' his auld freends—are no ye, Zedekiah? And doesna fash *them* wi' his tantrums!" she added, casting a side shaft at Janet who, with sour face averted, passed on her way to remove the tea things.

"Dinna notice her," Miss Rankin whispered to B. ("as if," as B. afterwards recounting the scene to Mrs. Patrick said, "I'd have been likely to make

remarks on such a delicate subject ") " That's just her way. We're used with each other, and I'm not minding when it's only me, but she should behave before company.

" Is she not afraid you'd be annoyed and send her away?"

" Her afraid! Why, she's had notice to quit many a time. But all she ever says is: " If you dinna appreciate when ye've a gude seh-rrvant I ken fine when I've gotten a gude place." And what can a body answer to that? Come now, Zedekiah Rankin, are ye for a twa handed crack wi' me the day?"

" Ay am I," croaked the parrot, his head on one side and the glitter of his eye fixed sideways on the strangers.

" Come away then. What'll you say to me?"

" I'm for nane o' yer bare-fit broth."

" Oh, ye're a treat, so ye are. That's because I hav'na given him his tea."

" What does he like? Shall I get him some shortbread?" asked Alison.

" No, he's for cake. I know his taste fine . . but I forgot ye the day, my mannie, so I did."

" Auld kail runt," growled the parrot.

" Come, come, none o' yer impiddence to me. Here's a leddy brought yer cake to ye. What'll ye say for it, Zedekiah? It's no of-ten ye've anyone so young and bonnie to get yer tea to ye."

" Get o'ot o' my rodd, ye muckle gawpus," screamed the parrot.

" Toots, where's yer manners? That's no the way to speak."

“Haud yer wheesht, wumman.”

“Come, come, if ye dinna like strange folk tell me what ye think o’ yer auld freend Adamina. Come, say it pretty, now.”

“A dispensation that maun be tholed,” he declared with a chuckle that was, as Jim said, so horribly human that one almost believed the bird understood and enjoyed his own remark.

“Well, if yer so ill-mainered I’m away.”

“All goin’ Ayr way?” inquired the parrot, interrupting her in sharp interrogation, his head on one side; then, after pausing a moment for the answer, added: “M’hm . . . ay’he. . . . That’s nice!”

“No, I said we were away. Gude day to ye, Zedekiah, my mannie.”

“Gude day, Mem,” he answered with a bob of his head. Then added, in the huskiest of whispers, “Auld kail runt that ye are!”

A witticism that brought a gleam of triumph, not unlike the glint in his own eye, into that of Janet as she passed tray in hand; and caused his mistress, while telling him he was “an ill set rascal,” to laugh heartily.

“Do you think he really understands you?” asked A.

“Of course he does,” B. insisted, “how can you ask such a question?”

“Well, I like to think so, anyway,” Miss Rankin admitted, “and his answers is whiles so pat and so pur-rpose-like, ye canna misdoot but he does.”

“I’m certain he does,” B. declared so vehemently that they all laughed.

"I'm no freens wi' you the day," came in a shrill staccato from the kitchen.

"He thinks we're makin' a mock of him," explained his mistress, "and it jist sends him demented, for he's as knowledgeable as a bairn and as consatie. Beasts are queer kittle cattle, so they are. But now for our colly-shangy. Will ye draw in the chairs, Miss Bethia?"

"Here's one for you, Miss Rankin, and for Jim, as he's an invalid; but I'd rather sit on the floor. It's more like the Nursery."

"Will ye not take the wee creepie?" inquired her hostess, bringing forward a three-legged stool.

"No, I'm for the floor," B. maintained. "By the bye, tell me, Miss Rankin, didn't I once come here to tea with my Nannie, and have dropped scones and honey?"

"Ay, did ye, Miss Bethia, and that more'n once't."

"Ah, I said so!" cried B. triumphant, "now didn't I, A.?"

"Yes, but I didn't come, did I Miss Rankin?"

"No, it was when you and your Mother were away one time. . . in London I think. . . and it was sort o' sub rosa your Nannie brought over."

"But why? Why didn't we always come?"

"Ask me no questions and I'll tell ye no lees!" Miss Rankin answered oracularly. And no further explanation was forthcoming.

"Well, if you won't you won't," B. concluded, "so now let's begin the symposium. I want all the nursery rhymes first. . . I can begin some, but can't get them finished."

So, seated round the blazing coal and peat fire—Miss Rankin in the “high-backed settee,” Alison on the “creepie,” Jim in the huge arm-chair with what was known in that house as “the lugs to it,” and B. on the floor—that wet chilly afternoon was enjoyably spent.

“There was one,” B. began, “something about,

“John Smith, fellow fine,

Can ye shoe this horse o’ mine?”

“Yes, sir, that I can,

Just as weel as any man,”

Jim broke in eagerly. “But what came next?”

“Pit a bit upon the tae,

To gar the pownie speil the brae;

Pit a bit upon the heel

To gar the pownie trot weel, trot weel,
trot weel.”

came in a chorus from the Maitlands.

“That’s it,” cried the old lady delighted, “and there’s one for yer fingers, gie me over yer hand, Miss Bethia.”

And with delight they all listened while she pinched each finger in turn, beginning with the thumb as she recited:

“This ane biggit the barn,

This ane stealt the corn,

This ane stood and saw,

This ane ran awa,

And wee Peerie-Weerie paid for aw’!”

“What’s the one about your face, Miss Rankin?” asked Jim.

“Oh, I know that,” A. declared eagerly, and,

turning to her brother, she touched his forehead, eyes, nose, cheek, mouth, and chin as she repeated in nursery sing-song :

“ Brow, brow, brentie ;
Eye, eye, winkie ;
Nose, nose, nebbie ;
Cheek, cheek, cherrie ;
Mouth, mouth, merrie ;

Chin chopper, chin chopper, chin chopper.”

“ I always resented the chin chuck at the end—and do so still,” grumbled Jim. “ But what else, Miss Rankin. We want more.”

“ Did ye ever hear tell,” she asked, as, smiling delightedly, she complied : “ how it used to be considered profane to use the wurds of psawms and paraphrases for prac-ti-sing the tunes? So, to get them exercised in the tunes without profanity, they made up verses in the same metre, in place o’ the sacred ones that could only be used Sabbaths.”

“ No, did they? What a queer idea?”

“ So it is—but mebbe no queerer than the way we still keep o’or releegion only for the Sabbath : thinking, mebbe, that it’s like the old proverb against trashin’ yer gude clothes by wearin’ them week days. “ Ilka day braw, Sabbath a dilly-daw’ !”

Bethia and Jim both glanced at her, an appreciative gleam in their eyes, but neither of them spoke, and Alison asked :

“ Do you know what the verses were, Miss Rankin?”

“ I’m feared I canna remember but two. My

faither had lashons o' them—but they've slippit my memory. Here's one t'ye though :

“ ‘ I gaed and keekit up the lum
The skies for to behold,
A dad o' soot fell in my 'ee
And did me near blindfold.' ”

“ Isn't that delightful? And the other one, Miss Rankin ?”

“ Personally,” Miss Rankin declared, I prefu-rr my second string before my furst. Here it's :

“ ‘ There's auld John Brown, that wicked man,
Ye'll never see him more ;
He stole his feyther's coffin lid
To mak' a henhouse door.' ”

“ Ay,” she went on, her face becoming set and serious, and a red glow blazing suddenly in the wonderful old eyes,—set deep beneath their pent-house brows—to which the thatch of grey hairs seemed to give added depth and brilliance, “ I niver think on that vurrse but it minds me o' our present Government.”

“ Which of them ?” asked Alison.

“ There's no need to pit a name to ony one ; for, to my mind, they've aw got a lick o' the same paint ; and are all self-seeking enough to be capable o' the act o' yon wicked man. It's extrord'nary the way these auld proverbs, that ye'd have hoped would be obsolete by now, fits on as if they'd been made for them.”

“ As how, Miss Rankin ?”

“ Well, hear to this one . . . ‘ They sit gie still

wha' have a riven breek.' . . . How better would you describe the shilly-shally, do-nothing-whatever-pō-licy of them? It's jist them in a nutshell . . . So it is! And then there's that desperate hankering to get to themselves gold. Heard you ever this: 'They liket mutton weel that licket where the auld yowe lay'? Could ye better express that there's no degraded thing a man winna stoop to when he's after the filthy lucre that's become an obsession to him? . . . Ay, the lust o' gold's gotten many a one i' this country into its grip. There's few . . . one pairty or th' ither . . . that's not bowed themselves a wee bittie to the god that the Israelites made in the for-rm o' a calf . . . an' ye havena far to seek to know what the penalty o' that is. . . . Ay, it's that awfy yellow fever for gold, an' the infection of it spreads an' rins through the country-side just as 'ae scabbit sheep'll smit the hale hirdsell.'

"It's horribly true . . ." murmured Jim, "but how do you know . . .?"

"Because I have been young, laddie, and now I am old . . . But I didna mean," she went on, suddenly changing her tone, "to cast a gloom on our cosy fire-side wi' talk like this. We'll lur-rn—ay we'll aw lur-rn in time—tho' mebbe it'll need the furnace o' experience. An' we have some'll pull us through—gin we'll haud by them and uphold them—an' not let yon self-seekin' gang smoor them in their glaur."

"K. of K.," suggested Bethia.

"Ay, there's a man for ye. And I can pit a proverb to him too: 'A hedge aboot his freens an' a heckle to his foes.' Does that not fit him to a

hair? But could he no give us martial law, d'ye think?—If I had my way o't, there's not only be aliens inturnd (an' I'd have seggregation for them aw' whether they've naturalised themselves or no; for—auld sneck-drawers as they are—it's the ones that's had the nouse to naturalise themselves that'll likely be the wurst), but I'd have in a good selection o' the ither self-seekers as weel. And there's just one or two that I'd lead—along with the spies, for they're the verra marra of them :

“ ‘ Up the grass Market,
Doun the nether Bow;
Up a long ladder,
Doun a little tow.’ ”

“ Hangin's too good for them,” Alison declared;
“ I'd do much worse than that. . . ”

“ Nonsense, A., ” Jim interrupted, almost roughly.
“ You'd do nothing of the sort if you'd seen what that kind of thing means. . . And how it degrades those that do it. They must be got quit of course, but not cruelly. ”

Alison was opening her mouth to argue, but B. pinched her; and mindful of childish experiences, she actually did not ask what she was being pinched for !

“ I'm thinkin' yer right, Mr. James, ” said Miss Rankin, gravely. “ It's the evil sperrit we're wantin' to get quit o'—an' we'll never do that by having the same sperrit o'orselves. I think shame to myself forgetting that, when it was my ain Father that aye upheld “ Vengeance is Mine, saith the Lor-rd, I will repay. ” Though I'll not deny it's

to me a hard saying—for I'm aye wantin' to hit back at them mysel. So I am."

"But I don't see why you shouldn't," Alison declared. "We must help ourselves."

"Up to a point, yes—but wi' yer eye on yer Guide and His Book. . It's the only way to travel the rodd we're aw bound to travel, come soon come syne. We've aw gotten o'or Bradshaw—ay and o'or Courier forby. And if—wi'aw that—we've strayed frae the path like lost sheep, would ye wonder at the Shepherd's having to send o'ot the dogs o' War to get us back?"

"Then you think troubles and trials—all the things we call sorrow—are good for us?"

"Sake's alive! Hear to him! Do I think? Why there's never a doubt to it, laddie. Discipline's what we need. . And it's the truest kindness when we get it. So let none o' us turn our back on trouble, Mr. James, any more nor we would on the guns. . but be each one turning his face to meet it. . thanking the Gude God for our opportunities. . and asking Him to see us through them to the Glory beyond."

"Do you mean Heaven?" asked Alison. "I hate the idea of working for a reward."

"How would ye get away from it, Miss Alison? It'll take ye all ye know *not* to wurrk for that."

"But I do not, Miss Rankin."

"D'ye no? . . What do ye wurrk for then?"

"Because I like to feel I am doing my best."

"And will onybody tell me whaten a better reward ye could have? Is't not the grandest reward ye can get? Does it not warrm ye

through an' through till yer very heart's jist on fire wi' it? Na, na, ye'll get the reward, I'm thinking, whether ye'll be lookin' for it or no," she went on with the voice and in the manner that Bethia thought of as 'the patriarchal touch'—"once ye turn back from straying doun the wrang rodd—an' there's a wheen o' us hae gone bittie far—not knowin' ourselves what we'd be after. . . Like bairns greetin' in the dark—it's Tennyson says that, is it not?—Though personally I canna get away from it that I aye ken weel what I'm greetin' for mysel.' "

"Miss Rankin". . Jim abruptly began, and stopped as abruptly.

"Weel, laddie. . Come away wi' it."

"I was only wondering. . about the troubles, I mean . . if they do help really. . . "

"Ye needn't look far afield to see that. There's Lady Maitland herself. . Jist see how she's facing up to them. . I tell ye it's grand. . ay, it's wonnerful. . She that before the call came. . Weel, weel, I'm not the one to cast it up to her. . And I couldna if I would. . for she has nobbut to give me a glint o' her e'e an' aw I may hae thought I had against her's melted clean away, like the sun on a snow drift. . . For there's no one I could name wi' such a glamour to her as your mother, Mr. James, and this I will say. . . "

"Here's the sodjers," announced Janet, suddenly throwing open the door, her face radiating excitement. "I hear the pipes o' them doun by the Loch."

With which announcement she disappeared, rush-

ing out into the little garden, closely followed by Miss Rankin and her guests.

“How I love the pipes—don’t you?” said Bethia as she wrapped a tartan shawl she had caught up in passing through the tiny entrance hall, and wrapped it round the old lady’s shoulders.

“Ay, do I. . . And the creepie-crappie it gives me doun my back. . . Please the Lor-rd I’ll never be too auld to feel that.”

And they were not alone in their enthusiasm. All along the road women crowded to their doors, girls ran out into the street to wave and shout greetings—even to give a hurried grip of the hand, or more affectionate mark of favour—to the men swinging past in their kilts. The very children yelled in sympathy with a demonstration the why and wherefore of which was beyond their comprehension.

As the shrill skirl of the pipes died away in the distance, Miss Rankin suddenly turned upon Janet, who—her apron thrown over her head—was sobbing in a transport of hysterical agitation, and, apparently in answer to some remark of her hand-maid’s, burst forth in another of her jeremiads.

“What for no, wumman? Have ye no the gumption to perceive that to die a glorious death is far an’ away before living a useless life—like you and me’s mebbe doin’ . . .”

“But aw’ thae bewtiful lads . . I canna thole to think on it . . .”

“Dinna think on it, then . . What gude will your greetin’ do them onyway—when it’s o’or prayers that they’re needin’? . . Ay, it cam ower

me like a flood as I stood watchin' them marchin' to their glory, that you an' me that's far past the days when we'd hae gotten a glint o' the e'e frae ony one o' them can aye gie then what'll lift them on far better nor aw thae lassies they're so taen up wi', for we can add to that glory by pourin' out on them the spirit o' prayer."

"Ay, ay," the maid responded drying her eyes and taking up the parable from her mistress. "And we hae Bible warrant for it that there's children o' the Sper-rit of mair account than thae war babies ye hear sic a clash aboot. . . And even auld carlins like you and me can hae more o' them than she hath an husband."

CHAPTER XXII.

On leaving Miss Rankin's Alison parted from the other two, declaring she had "something to see to" at the Institute. It was a fine frosty evening, with myriads of stars glittering and winking in the canopy of heaven. Bethia tucked her hand into the pocket of her brother's coat—a childish habit of her's—as she walked homewards beside him, feeling "nearer and comfier," as she expressed it to herself, than she had done since his return.

"I am glad this is your well arm," she said contentedly, pressing nearer to him, "for it's always been my special niche here beside it."

Jim grunted, his pipe in his mouth.

"Did I hear you asking Miss Rankin about the Cleggs?" she went on.

"H'm-h'm."

"Why didn't you ask me?"

"D'you know them?"

"Yes, of course. They're part of the New Departure."

"Why?"

"Lots of whys, I suppose. For one thing Mr. Patrick says they—the whole species, I mean—are the lubricators of the Big Machine."

"Sounds well. Does it mean anything?"

"Of course it does, you great silly.—It means everything."

"Comprehensive any way. Well, what else?"

“What else—when I’ve said everything.”

“Everything’s the same as nothing. But what I suppose he means is that they’re the backbone of the Country—and, by Jove! so they are.”

“D’you think so, Jim, really,”

“Of course I do. I know it—now. Can’t you see they—the workers—are the only thing that count?”

Bethia reflected a moment.

“I suppose so,” she admitted reluctantly. Then added with conviction: “All I can say is, I doubt if I’ll ever care to be on terms of intimacy with my back bone.”

“That’s simply idiotic—and you know it.”

“Possibly—even probably.”

“What ails you at them, B.? as Miss Rankin would say.” He looked at her keenly.

“That’s just what I don’t know. I do like them—in bits.”

“Which bits?”

“D’you mean the Cleggs?”

“They’ll do as a sample. But first tell me—how’ve you come to know them? We usedn’t to, In pre-historic days that awful little Mysie Cunningham was—for some pre-historic reason—the only one we ever knew.”

“We usen’t to do anything we do now. I don’t know why Mother called. . . I think it was somehow through Miss Rankin. She and Mrs. Patrick together. Any way they came to luncheon—away back at the very beginning.”

Jim stopped and took his pipe out of his mouth to give vent to a whistle of sheer amazement. “You

mean Mother's actually condescended to have them to luncheon."

Bethia nodded. "That's only one of the lesser innovations," she said, smiling rather wistfully; "you know we're really frightfully changed."

"We must be. . . Then this beastly war is being of some good here as well."

Bethia looked at him curiously.

"You mean that, Jim, really? But of course you do, and—truly and really—so do I. . . Only . . the Cleggs . . ."

"Well—out with it. . Are they to be classed with the impossible specimens—for there are some, of course—everywhere."

"No . . not altogether . . Not the old mother. She's a dear. I don't know what we'd have done without her. She is Mother's right hand in all this sifting and shifting we are going through. And, though in a way he's a terrible bounder, I can't help rather liking old Sir Thomas. He does so love to tell you how sharp he is—and how rich—and that he has bested everyone else. It's just like a child. Indeed he is one—for all his boasted business experience and capacity for 'gauging the markets' as he calls it. Just like a child, bursting to let you know how well he has managed and what a splendid time he is having—rather how we felt when we climbed on to the top of the garden wall, or higher up the old chestnut tree than the others. Somehow you can't help rather liking him for telling you all about it, and being so childishly cock-a-hoop over his own perspicacity—even though it is a bit bounder-y."

“And the son? I gather your principal crab is at him.”

“Oh Jim—he is awful.”

“A worse bounder than Papa? It’s very odd how often they are. A little polish is apparently a dangerous thing, too.

“No, it’s worse than boundering—I could have forgiven him that. He’s a rank coward and outsider. Just imagine staying at home—here in Kildree—at a time like this—not doing a thing for his country—but just going on making money as usual. It’s too horrible—despicable—and I loathe him for it. But”—withdrawing suddenly from the passionate note, perhaps observing the amused expression flitting momentarily across her brother’s face, and becoming extremely dignified and impersonal—“that is why money is said to be ‘the root of all evil.’ ”

“I don’t think I quite follow your argument—if argument it be.”

“No, it’s not. I hate arguments—but I hate cowards worse.”

“Tut-tut.” And now there was no doubt Jim was laughing.

“Well, I do, Jim,” she went on again hotly, “I hate them—and him. It’s so mean and disgusting to be a mere slave to the obsession of money-making. One doesn’t mind old Sir Thomas so much. After all he made it himself and has some right to be proud of it. But that great lump of a son just living on his father’s brains and industry, and thinking of nothing but making more and more and more—while his father and mother sit admiring

him and—especially his mother—thinking all the world of ‘our John,’ as she calls him. It’s perfectly sickening. But I suppose he’s afraid.” The emphasis Bethia put on the last word was portentous.

All Jim’s response was a low pipe-smothered chuckle. At sound of it Bethia, furious and—for some strange reason—feeling hot, shy, almost ashamed, made a dash for the house, coming now into sight. Leaving her brother, still gurgling to himself, to make his way through the masses of laurel and rhododendron glistening frostily in the moonlight, to the smoking-room, there to finish his pipe and his chuckle by the blazing wood fire.

Next day Jim went to see Mrs. Patrick. The ostensible reason of his doing so was to bring a note and a parcel for his mother. It was pouring in torrents and she—afraid of increasing a chill—thought it better not to face the storm. They talked perfunctorily on various subjects, and she felt, even more than she had been prepared to feel, the invisible barrier raised up about him. Then, almost before she had had time to realise he was there he had said :

“ Well, I must really be going. . . ah,” as a gleam of watery sunshine broke through the clouds,” I do believe it’s going to clear.”

And walking over to the window stood silently looking out. This was indeed a changed Jim. Mrs. Patrick lay watching him where he stood, the pale wintry gleam on his face, noting the aged look of eyes and mouth, asking herself how anyone could say he was not much altered. The boyishness was

gone—completely—and a something that many years of ordinary life might not have given had taken its place. At that moment he looked, she thought, almost old and stern. Something of the loneliness of age, too, seemed to invest him as well. And at thought of the suffering such ageing denoted her heart ached afresh for him—and his mother—the mother who did not understand. Yet if the lesson is worth learning, she told herself, the suffering, too, is worth while. And she had come to believe implicitly in both.

As if he had divined her thoughts he turned to her abruptly, asking: “Did . . . does Mother ever talk to you about Ron., Mrs. Patrick?”

“Yes—often—when we are alone. He is never out of her thoughts for a moment.”

“Yes, I know . . . I felt sure of it . . . but she has never said a word. . . . I wish to God it had been me. . . .” Then shying away, all in a moment, from the subject he had himself broached, exclaimed—his whole tone and manner changing: “What a ripping view you have from here, but I suppose it’s even better from Mr. Patrick’s new bay-window?”

“Yes, Pat says he can get a glimpse of the sea from his crow’s nest, as he calls it.”

“Capital! Well, I must really be going.”

Turning, his hand out-stretched to say good-bye, he looked at her searchingly, as if she, like the view, was a novel discovery, and remarked:

“What a rotten time you must have lying there always like that.”

“Ah, the Hospital has shown you how good it is to be able to get about on your own—hasn’t it?”

“Rather. . . It’s awful to think of all those poor chaps disabled for life—some even quite blind.”

“That must be the worst. I feel I could bear anything but that.”

And then she found herself telling him about her Pat and his bitter disappointment at not being able to take the post he had been offered.

“Poor chap,” Jim said, sitting down beside her and quite forgetting he had been going away. “It is hard luck. By the way, where is he? Out, I suppose?”

“Yes, he’s generally out till late.”

“I say—Aren’t you very lonely sometimes, Mrs. Patrick?” he asked, eyeing her with an expression she involuntarily thought of as ‘hungry.’

“No, not very—not now.”

“You think one gets used to things?” Again the question was anxious, his expression almost painfully eager.

“Yes, certainly,” she answered, “if . . if one learns how.”

“Do you think Mother will ever get used to it’s being me and not Ron?”

“She doesn’t require to. She’s just as fond. . .”

“No, she’s not,” he interrupted. “How could she be? I’d rather she wasn’t. Only I do wish I could tell her I understand.”

“Why don’t you?”

“I’ve tried . . And . . I can’t.”

“Try just once again. You could—and I am sure she would like it.”

“Has she ever said anything to you? . . No, don’t tell me. Even if she has you couldn’t say.”

Knowing how true that was she was silent. Her heart ached to see such traces of suffering on the still boyish face, yet, by some strange intuition, she felt certain that in spite of—even because of—that suffering there was ‘Something’ that—as she believes—‘makes it worth while.’

As she waited in silence the belief became stronger till—looking up—their eyes met and his smiled.

“D’you know,” he said, and once again he was the Jim she had known from a child, “I used often to think of this room, and how he loved coming over here to tea. When . . . out there . . . became Hell to me I thought of this as Heaven. There always was a sort of Sunday feel about it—and you. Ron. loved it, always; but, sometimes—pretty often I think—I didn’t want it and felt bored.”

“I don’t wonder!”

He laughed, and so did she.

“It’s making it a set apart Sunday sort of thing that’s so boresome, I think,” she said.

“You mean every day gets to be—that sort—not just bits?”

“Yes, don’t you think so? . . . After all, Heaven only means not being handicapped any more by the material . . . It’s not a place . . . not at any rate what we mean by a place—but a state . . . the home of the Spirit—at least that’s how I always think of it.”

“I wish other people saw it like you.”

“They do—only probably much better. But none of us are much good at talking about it—not yet.”

“One so loathes to be thought to be . . .” The pause was expressive.

“ Yes, I know . . . To me,” Mrs. Patrick went on after a moment, (and how was he to know the effort it was to her to speak), “ it’s as if we were only just beginning to see. If you think of it like that—as if everyone was blind—only one or two seeing a very, very little—those that were still blind would think the others that caught glimmers and said what they saw were . . . ”

“ Talking the most awful rot,” Jim interrupted. “ Yes, wouldn’t they? How funny it is.”

“ Yes . . . it is odd. . . . But what I think oddest of all is how this war is teaching us. . . . We really *are* beginning to see. . . . ”

“ By Jove! you do see out there! ”

“ We see a ‘ wee bittie ’ even in Geesekirk. . . . And . . . Jim . . . you don’t regret having had to . . . to be made to see—do you? ”

“ No . . . you can’t regret that. . . . But one regrets the—the getting there . . . Oh, Mrs. Patrick . . . I must tell you . . . you won’t mind—will you—for I think it would be—be easier to go on . . . if I could only tell someone.”

Without speaking she nodded assent.

“ At . . . at first, you know,” he began haltingly, “ I—I liked it. . . . It seems so awful now—but I did. . . . You can’t understand—you couldn’t—no one who hasn’t been through it could. But the truth is, I liked it.” His whole expression had suddenly altered, so that looking at him she shuddered, and shuddering looked away. “ It is true—it was a positive joy to me . . . I saw red . . . And I liked it. . . . But Ron. hated it from the first. I know now how he felt—but I didn’t know then.

And, when he told me, I laughed at him. . . Think of it—laughed. I remember so well our meeting and his saying, ‘This is Hell.’ . . And I laughed. How could I have been such a brute? . . but I did . . I thought that his loathing was want of pluck . . and that it was manly to like it—and laugh—so I did. . . And—and I can see his face now. . . But then I didn’t know what he meant . . and so I despised it. . . He said if it wasn’t for Mother—and that he knew how she’d mind—he’d have prayed to be killed . . he so loathed it. . . And I thought him a coward. . . And I said so . .”

Mrs. Patrick heard the sound of a quick in-drawn breath—a gasp . . . and did not know that it came from herself.

After a pause he went on again, his voice gaining steadiness—strength. “Then, you know, he was wounded, and, when he might have gone home he would not. He went back . . and that—that was my doing . . and now it is I who am here . . I . . who called him a coward. . . Oh, God! I can’t bear it. . . .”

“But my boy. . .”

“Yes . . I know . . you want to say it wasn’t my fault . . but it was—for I called him—Ronny—a coward. . . Yet, after a bit . . one begins to understand—one knows that it’s really all right . . all right for him . . I mean . . only Mother. . .”

“You need not feel like that, for she doesn’t. . . She is very proud of her Ronny. . . .”

“And well may she be so. . Then—later—I began to understand. . but I didn’t at first. . And that was my Hell—only I wasn’t like him—for I

was one of the devils—and that's a thousand times worse."

"Then how. . .?"

"How did I get out of it do you mean? I'm coming to that. . . only it's not a thing any one will believe. . . You just can't. . . till you see. When—when it was all at the worst I met a fellow I used to know at Eton, who meant things—and understood, as you do. . . He was such a splendid chap—the Head of his House—in the Eleven—and an all-round nailer at everything. . . You'd never have guessed he'd a thought for—anything else. Then—it was one night we were in the trenches—and, just about dawn, we saw the Germans coming on and realised the tight place we were in. There were only a few of us, and they were thousands—or any way they looked it. . . 'We're done,' I said. . . 'Damn. . . ' All he answered was: 'Are we?' . . . Then, turning to us all, as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world, he said: 'Let us ask God to help us. . . and—if that's for the best—to keep us safe. . . But, any way, we are all right in His Hands. . . '

.
 "I don't know what happened. . . I can't explain it at all. . . only I know we did ask. . . and we believed—just because of the way he had said it. . . And so the help came. . . "

"You mean. . . "

"I mean the Germans collapsed. . . they fell down—and were dead. When they never came on we went forward and there they were lying. . . We saw them. . . dead. . . It's been explained lots of ways, but I only know how I saw it. . . How it was. . . "

“And your friend ”

“He was killed. . . When we had time to do anything but wonder, we found he was dead. . . That, of course, easily happens. There’s nothing strange about that. . . But I’m as certain as that I sit here it was his prayer that saved us. . . Only of course I know nobody would believe it.”

“I do.”

“Yes, I thought perhaps you might.”

“And so would your mother.”

“Mother!” His voice was incredulous. “Why should she?”

“Because we’re all learning that the test of how much life has taught us is whether—at the crucial moment—we say ‘Damn’ . . . or . . . we pray . . .”

Jim made no answer. He got up and went to the window, where he again stood looking out—silently—at the hills now visible, now shrouded in mist, as the wind blew the cloud wreaths to and fro all about them.

“It’s not,” he said at last, but as if he was speaking to himself, “It’s not as if I were Ron. . .” And again there was silence.

“Not as if I was Ron. . .” The words rang sadly in Mary Patrick’s ears. . . for were they not the very same words his Mother had used. . . “It’s not as if he was Ron,” she had said. . .

How was it possible to help such a position. . . Could she say anything? . . . What was there to say. . . ?

In the silence she listened to the wind in the fir trees. . . Hush. . . Hush. . . they said, and again . . . Hush. . . Hush. . .

So she waited in silence.

“I think I see what you mean. . . I think I will try and tell her. . .” Jim said at last, turning and coming towards her.

Had he, too, been listening to voices whispering in the wind that went sooch-sooching through the tree tops?

“Those things don’t go into words—do they—but somehow one gets to understand. . . I think”—the eyes looking down into Mrs. Patrick’s shyly deprecated their own seriousness—“It comes in things like the hills. . . and the wind. . . what I suppose you call nature . . . And . . . Oh, in lots of ways. . . once you begin to understand even a little. . . I remember that fellow I told you about used to say so. . . He said ‘Somehow you learn’ . . . ‘and. . . somehow. . . you do. . .’”

“Yes,” Mrs. Patrick agreed, “whenever we want to. . . I believe it’s best to leave it at that. . . only—Jim dear—*do* tell your mother. . . and see. . .”

Jim nodded, making that indescribable sound I write “H’m-h’m.”

And, accordingly, they left it at that.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Lady Maitland's special sanctum is a charming little room which, one chilly afternoon in early December, gave a particularly cosy and home-like impression. Its blazing wood fire made dancing lights and shadows on bright flowered chintzes, glittering china and silver of tea-things, and added a faint pungent flavour to the scent of violets and other sweet smelling flowers, of which there is always a profusion.

Bethia, entering from the outer chill and drizzle and longing for tea, was horrified to find her mother sobbing among the cushions of a big arm-chair in which her face was buried.

"Darling," she exclaimed, throwing herself precipitately on the floor beside her mother and putting protecting arms round shoulders quivering convulsively, "Mimsy, my precious . . what has happened?"

"It . . it's that . . " A letter was held out in the hand limply dangling.

"From Lady Mountford . . " Bethia commented in a tone of no small relief. "That's Mrs. Hartwell's sister, isn't it?"

"Yes . . poor, poor Chatty . . "

While Bethia read the letter Lady Maitland, partially recovering, sat up and dried her tears.

"It's so . . so awful . . isn't it, B.? Poor, poor Chatty . . what she must feel. . . "

“Yes,” Bethia assented; “but I’m sorrier for the boy. . . Just think what he must have gone through. . .”

And together they discussed a story sufficiently tragic to call forth full sympathy from both, yet revealing a curiously different point of view in mother and daughter.

Briefly, the story was this:

Dennis Hartwell—a lad of twenty—had, it appeared, gone out to France full of the sort of excitement that, as Bethia rather scathingly remarked, “might be expected of the son of such a mother.” There his first experience of the fighting line had been utterly disastrous. “No one knows,” his aunt wrote, “what came over him, but the fact is, he found himself in full flight.”

Appalled at such an unimaginable collapse, he had—in utter horror and despair—tried to put an end to the life he had run away to save. Or so at least it was presumed. For, when he came to himself in Hospital with a bullet wound in his head, he remembered nothing except the hideous fact of this finding himself in full flight. There had been no attempt to excuse or palliate what he had done. His aunt—with unconscious irony—vouched for that as “the one bright spot in the whole ghastly story.” Everything else was “too dreadful to think of.” Most dreadful of all—a point to which, as the needle of the compass to the north, she invariably returned—was the “fearful disgrace to the family.” That, she explained, was the cause of Mrs. Hartwell’s nervous breakdown, necessitating retirement to a Nursing Home;

“where,” her sister wrote, “we trust and pray that with complete rest and feeding up the poor darling may recover from the shock. But it is all very grim.”

The letter ended with an explanation evidently felt by the writer to be some slight palliation of the “grimness.”

“Of course we always knew that the Hartlands are nobodies, which no doubt accounts for” (and possibly to some extent it does) “the extraordinary lapse of that courage which, for all these generations, has invariably distinguished our family. It just shows,” she naïvely concluded, “what a mistake those mixtures are, and I don’t mind saying now that it has always been a marvel to me that Chatty, of all people, should have married a man who was not one of us.”

“Mother,” Bethia’s face was expressive of dismay and disgust, “how perfectly awful.”

“Yes, isn’t it? . . . poor, poor Chatty . . . the disgrace of it all is enough to kill her, poor thing.”

“The disgrace! Oh, Mother, how can you?”

In no small perplexity Effie Maitland regarded the strange fire that flashed from her young daughter’s eyes. What on earth did B. mean? she inwardly marvelled. And as she hesitated the girl went on:

“Disgrace. How can they think of disgrace? I mean what this idiot of an aunt calls ‘the fearful disgrace to the family—compared to—to him. . . Only think of it, Mother . . . What that child—for, after all, Dennis is only a child—must have suffered—and now she says he has to go back for a Court

Martial—that sensitive, high strung up . . oh, Mother . .” her lips quivered, and the blaze in the blue eyes that had been so startlingly vivid was drowned in a sudden rush of tears.

“Yes,” Lady Maitland admitted, a view other than that set forth by the friends of her girlhood dawning gradually on her consciousness, “I do see it must have been awful for him, too, of course. . .”

“Awful. Far more awful for him than for anyone. . . And to think that these two old cats—yes, Mother, I will call them that, for they are—should be purring about their second-class feelings when he . . Oh, it makes me mad to think of their self-sufficient—what is the word?—egoism, isn’t it? Who cares tuppence for their silly family pride—their generations of it—in comparison to what that poor little chap must have gone through. Mother, don’t you remember Dennis here, only last Christmas—what a baby he was—and such a pickle. Up to all sorts of larks and as plucky as you make ’em. . . Whatever can have happened to the child? . .

“I suppose it must be, as Dee-dee Mountford says,—the Hartwell blood coming out.”

“Oh, Mother, what nonsense! I don’t believe a word of it. . . Much more likely his mother’s ridiculous uncontrolled nerves—and her senseless way of bringing him up. One could see he’d never had anything worth calling a mother to help him. . And don’t you remember the day she came over here, ever so long ago? . .”

“It was only last August.”

“Well, it seems like centuries ago. . and what

an ass she made of herself?—Not thinking of anything but that *she* must have work—and how *she* was affected by the war—and whether *her* Belgians were a comfort to *her*—and *her* Tommies iller and more numerous than other people's—I've no patience with the woman—and it's people like her that bring discredit on us all. . "

"Don't Bethia, don't be so censorious—not just now. . There's another letter—where is it?—I had it here a moment ago—from Aunt Ciss—she says the Nursing Home is only a polite fiction—it's really an Asylum—for poor Chatty has gone quite off her head. . "

"I don't wonder I'm sure. I always knew she would. And isn't it so like her to go off her head instead of standing by that poor boy and trying to help him."

"B. dear, I don't like to hear you speak like that—be so hard on poor Chatty when she's down."

"She deserves to be down. . No, Mother, it's no use. When people are like that why shouldn't one say they are odious? They are, and it's all their own faults.—I always knew she was no good—yes, Mother, I did. You're used to her, and so you don't see it. But I've always hated her, and I always knew she wasn't an atom of use to poor Dennis—indeed, I suppose that's really why I dislike her. One always does know, somehow, when people are rotters. . "

"Do you think so?" her mother interpolated doubtfully.

"Of course I do. I'm quite sure. . always." From the entire conviction of her tone it might

have been thought the 'general assertion was strengthened by some special instance.

-“Perhaps you may. . I only know I have more than once found I was mistaken. . You see one has got to know all the circumstances before one's opinion's much worth. And as to Chatty and Dee-dee, I daresay they seem different to me, for they've been my friends always.”

“Yes, I've always thought it so funny they were.”

“I assure you what you are accustomed to has a great deal to do with your judgments.”

“Possibly.” The tone was not one of conviction.

“Some day, perhaps, you may find that you, too, have been mistaken.” There was an undertone in her mother's voice that, for once, Bethia ignored.

“I don't think it's likely,” she said.

“My dear, that pronouncement was so like Grannie Stuart. . . I've heard Alison like her, often,—but never you.”

“She who held that women were out of place in the Arena—well, there's bits of her in me of course. Isn't it funny, Mimsy, when one comes to think of it what a jumble of bits and pieces one is? A regular rag-bag.” Veering in that absurd way she does into quite a different tone, Bethia added gravely: “P'raps we're here as rag-pickers, just to get our bags sorted—No wonder it's a bit of a jumble. . . Why, here's Jim. . Hullo, James, what have you been up to? . . Have some tea?”

“Rather!” Jim sank into the largest, most luxurious arm-chair, and graciously accepted the big

cup of tea that his sister's thoughtfulness had preserved for him, "poured off" in a little brown teapot by the fire.

"I'm a bit tired—yes—" in answer to an inquiry from his Mother, "but have had a spiffing afternoon."

"How? . . . Where?"

"Oh. . . Somewhere in Kildree!—going over Works."

"Had you, dear—do tell me."

"Yes, I want to. And you, too, B., it'll interest you, too, I expect." Was there a something—an inflection in his voice and the faintest twinkle, quickly extinguished, in his eye?

"It's a marvellous place. . . I wouldn't have missed seeing it for anything. And, by George, I'd like to be the fellow who's running it. The whole thing's perfectly splendid. I'll tell you all I can—but of course there's a lot I was only shown 'in the strictest confidence,' as they say, so must keep to myself."

And with that he launched into an enthusiastic description of a manufacture of the most needed 'munitions of war.'

"And all done by this one man," he concluded, in a voice vibrant with feelings that carried him quite out of his ordinary placidity. "He started it—put every penny he possessed into it (and I don't suppose there's much chance of his ever seeing most of his thousands again—though 'what does that matter?' was all he said when I suggested it). And not only that, but he has worked out all the experiments himself—just think what a brain he must

have. He turned what was his office into a splendid laboratory, and—as I could very well see, though he only laughed when I said so—has his life in his hand every day he works there. We don't run quarter the risk at the front that he does here, just quietly plodding along by himself and not a soul knowing or caring. Indeed I gather some people have dubbed him a coward for skulking at home."

"What a shame!" Lady Maitland exclaimed, "to think anyone should be so unfair."

"Well, you see, he doesn't gas about it. Indeed it was all I could do to drag out of him the information I did. So how should they guess what he's doing? He's one of the best chaps I ever met. Not a bit of side on him, in spite of all he's doing. And all on his own initiative, mind you. For he started it himself, and is carrying on, practically alone, a job that's doing more to win the war than a whole army corps of us who go out to France with such a skirling of pipes and banging of drums. Besides, if the invention he's hatching now pans out as it ought. . . however I mustn't say anything about that."

"And who is this wonderful discoverer you have discovered so unexpectedly in Kildree?"

"It wasn't so altogether unexpected. His name is getting to be known already as the inventor of more than one Hun-eradicator. That was why I hunted him up."

"But what is his name? Imagine our living practically next door and never having heard of him."

“His name? Well, it’s not a very grand one. His name is John Clegg.”

“Why Bethia, that’s surely the young man who came up to luncheon that day with his mother—with our dear Lady Clegg.”

But Bethia had left the room.

“How very odd. Why did she go? Did you see her?”

Jim nodded. And from his smile—some people might have called it a grin—his thoughts appeared to be amusing him.

“Is anything the matter?”

“I don’t think so. I wouldn’t ‘fash’ myself, mother mine. Only our B. has been a little free with her sting. . and—well, made a bit of a mistake in her sizing up of this young man—that is all.”

“Oh. . how funny.” And Lady Maitland, recalling the opinions Bethia had so lately enunciated, smiled also.

“So you’ve had him to luncheon?” Jim went on again after a pause. “Then you won’t mind my having asked him to come up to-morrow?”

“Not a bit. Indeed, I’ll be awfully interested to see him again . . now I know.”

“Don’t let’s tell B.,” he cautioned her. “She’s been rather horrid about him, you see; declared he was a shirker because he hadn’t joined up. So, if she knew she’d very likely give us the slip. And I want her to be there because I can see she’s been turning up her impertinent little nose at the poor chap, and he’s felt awfully snubbed. . . I’d the greatest difficulty in persuading him to come; and it’s a beastly shame, for he’s really a rattling good

chap, mother, although he's so clever. . . I mean . . you know what I mean. . . He's not a bit of a prig like some of those mugging sort of fellows are—but an awfully good sort."

"I love his old mother."

"Is she very old?"

"No, I don't suppose she is," laughed his mother, "about my own age, I dare say" (only she knew well there was a good ten years difference in reality and ten more in appearance). "Somehow I think of all mothers of grown-up sons and daughters as old—all, that is, except myself!"

"You'll never be old."

And indeed as he stood, his back to the blazing logs, looking down at her sitting there in the fire-light, some soft garment of a flimsy black sort draping but not concealing her pretty figure, her son thought how strange it was that a great, strong man like himself should really be the child of anything so girlish—so fragile—as she. An overwhelming tenderness towards her surged up within him.

"Mother," he said, "I . . I want to tell you . ."

And then, somehow, their arms were round each other, and the confidence each had so longed for was re-established as of old.

There are moments too sacred to be spoken of, and such a moment came to that mother and son, in the fire-lit dusk of an evening neither of them will ever forget. In it they drew so near to complete mutual understanding as gave a foretaste of that wonderful future when, like the blind man in the Gospel, we

shall be able to say : “ Whereas I was blind, now I see.”

“ It is very wonderful do you know, Jimmy dear,” his mother said later, looking up at him with eyes that explained more than her words, “ to be the mother of grown-up children. You have all the memories of the dear baby days, when you were their—what shall I say?—when they thought you were all sorts of wonderful things that you probably weren’t. And then you come to this bit when you aren’t afraid any more of their knowing what you really are like, and how little you know yourself,—so that you want to lean upon them, and look up to them, quite as much as they do to you—and that’s a nicer bit still. . . At least I think so—don’t you, my baby-Jimmy boy-man?”

To which all Jimmy answered was :

“ H’m-h’m.”

But it was an answer with which his mother was quite content.

CHAPTER XXIV.

So it was that next day Bethia, coming running down stairs after the luncheon gong had sounded, found herself face to face with John Clegg, who, in the wake of her mother, was crossing the hall to the dining-room.

"You know Mr. Clegg, B.—don't you?" said Lady Maitland noting with inward surprise the stiff, and awkward, inclination with which Bethia, her face growing crimson, greeted the stranger—but finishing in unruffled calm the sentence: "It is my elder daughter's 'shift,' as they call it, at the Hospital, so she will not be in. I am so interested,"—an increase in the warmth of her own manner marked her disapproval of her daughter's—"to hear from my son all you are doing at your works."

"Not all, mother, please," Jim hurriedly corrected, "for I only told you a very little of the little I know myself."

"Oh well, I mean all that I heard," laughed his mother. And the conversation went on in that channel, while Bethia sat dumb and miserably self-conscious, trying in vain to assume the appearance of an indifference she was furious at being unable to achieve.

Presently strikes, their origin and development, were discussed; and she noticed, with utterly unreasonable but increasing annoyance, that John Clegg, at home on such subjects, spoke easily.

Never in that house had the case for both sides been set forth so well, or so clearly.

“Then you think,” Jim inquired, “that the masters are just as much to blame as the men?”

“Sometimes—yes, I do. . . Does that surprise you so much?”—for the tone of the question was unmistakable. John Clegg’s voice had a ring of amusement and his grey eyes twinkled appreciatively. “The fact is,” he went on, “it’s as in everything—you can’t lay down hard and fast rules. Each case can only be judged on its merits—individually, like each person. My belief is, and I think you will agree with me”—he turned to Lady Maitland for corroboration of his contention, “that a good master makes a good servant. The whole thing is a question of give and take—elasticity is essential—in factories, in households, in families, and, they tell me,” again the keen—sometimes almost hard—grey granite eyes had that faint luminous sparkle, “the same holds good in married life. Neither party to any contract can expect to have it all his own way. The equilibrium must be rightly adjusted. When it is so, the balance is assured.”

His voice was pleasant—persuasive. No trace in it of laying down the law. Such were his evidently well-considered opinions—to be taken or left. His manner, a happy combination of deference—to his hostess—and ease, could only be natural. Bethia listened amazed.

Could this be the same John Clegg who had lunched here last August? This was no lout but a man. And a man of no mean calibre at that . .

strong yet gentle . . self-contained though decided . . efficient, with the efficiency that can only come from intimate knowledge—from wisely applied experience.

Yet, such is the perversity of human nature, the longer she listened—the surer she became that her unfair judgments covered more ground than even her brother's revelations had made plain—the angrier she felt; the more insistently she assured herself of her unalterable dislike of a personality that dominated her thoughts in a way she furiously resented.

It was not till after their adjournment to Lady Maitland's chintz-flowered and flower-scented room, for coffee and cigarettes, that the anger and resentment culminated in an ebullition that Bethia will never recall without blushing—or John Clegg without a smile.

It began by Lady Maitland repeating a phrase which had come to be a household word in the family.

"You great manufacturers," she declared, "are the lubricators of the great machine, as Mr. Patrick calls you."

"What is meant exactly by lubricate?" Jim inquired.

"Make run by their money, of course," asserted Bethia, finding herself plunging quite unexpectedly into the conversation.

"There I differ from him entirely." John Clegg's voice was decided, his manner so trenchant indeed as to give the impression that by his dictum he shot

rubbish into the ash-barrow. "Money as money—will never make good."

Bethia regarded him incredulously.

"*You* say that," she exclaimed, then as their eyes met and spoke in language not unknown though untaught, looked away again, reddening painfully.

"Yes, . I. Why should I not, Miss Maitland? Is it not conceivable that a man, through having made plenty of it, should learn how little worth money—as money—can be? Possibly to those who have not got—who never have had it—the working man for instance—money may seem all powerful . . When you have. . ." His gesture was expressive.

"But money is such a power. . ." Bethia paused on the edge of an obvious platitude.

"B. adores power," her brother divulged teasingly.

"Power—power for what?" There was a certain bitterness in John Clegg's tone. "Power to get yourself on in a world that can give you nothing you care for—to pile up, and pile up, and pile up, what is of no value, no real value—in itself. No, I've seen too much of that. I want something bigger—much bigger—to strive for. . I. . ."

He stopped abruptly, realising his feelings were carrying him further than he had intended. And Jim, noticing and sympathising, would have turned the subject by saying: "It's because you've got such lots you despise it. We all always want what we haven't got—don't we?"

Then Bethia once again intervened, courting destruction.

"Like that story of your's, Jim," she said, "don't

you remember? It was a Tommy talking to a German prisoner and asking him why he disliked us. "We don't dislike you," he said, "we hate you, we loathe and despise you." "But why?" "Because," said the German, "*you* fight for money while *we* fight for honour." "Ah," says the Englishman (I think myself he must have been Irish to have been so quick witted), "We all fight for what we haven't got." "I suppose," looking up, with a smile he took to be supercilious, "that is your case, Mr. Clegg."

"Thank you, Miss Maitland, I quite follow the inference."

For a moment Bethia was absolutely bewildered. Then as the implication he had chosen—most unfairly as she thought—to give to words uttered, it must be admitted, with no sinister intention, dawned on her anger out of all proportion to the occasion blazed up in her heart and flashed from her eyes.

"How dare you," she stammered, "how dare you turn my meaning all crooked like that . . . How dare you think I would say such a thing even—even if I meant it. . . It. . . it just shows . . ." But, mercifully, perhaps, she left the sentence unfinished, and before anyone had had time to recover from their astonishment, she had swept from the room—catching in her exit the brotherly advice to keep her hair on and the echo of a no less brotherly laugh of derision.

"Here we have our stinging B. when aroused," Jim commented, still laughing, as the door closed—a trifle too abruptly—"though what aroused her to

wrath I quite fail to follow. It seemed to me that it was rather you, Clegg, who might have felt offended at what she should obviously ‘rather have expressed otherwise.’ . . . Must you really be going? I’m sorry. . . . Well, good-bye. . . . You’ll let me come down again to the works one day—won’t you?—I’m awfully keen to know how that experiment of yours progresses.” . . . And Jim—the adieus to Lady Maitland being said—accompanied his guest to the door full of most cordially expressed hopes for meeting again soon.

“Really B. is too silly,” he complained with no small annoyance, on coming back to his mother. “She was given a splendid opportunity to be nice to the man she’s been abusing and misjudging, and instead she went and spoilt the whole show. What on earth is the matter with her, Mum? She sulked the best part of lunch time and then burst out like a fury at the finish.”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. She certainly was very odd,” his mother agreed, “not a bit like herself. . . . I suppose it’s all this fuss of doing all sorts of things they’re not accustomed to gets on their nerves. But anyway,” she decided, “I don’t expect Mr. Clegg paid much attention. He is too engrossed with his works and all his plans and ideas. What a nice man he is. . . .” And so the subject was turned.

Far from being too engrossed with his own affairs the “nice man’s” thoughts were full of Bethia, and Bethia only, as he walked down the hill homewards. How he had got away from the Maitlands—what Jim had said or he answered—John could not have

told. He was oblivious of everything but overwhelming admiration of the young fury whose eyes had blazed into his. Here, he told himself, was a return to primitive woman, in spite of all the barriers of good breeding and distinctions of class. And as primitive woman John Clegg found Bethia Maitland adorable. So adorable, indeed, that she roused in him the primitive man instinct to fight tooth and nail for and win her for his own, in spite of—perhaps all the more on account of—barriers that at one time had seemed insuperable. For, by some curious process, that momentary exhibition of sheer genuine human nature had brought nearer to him than he would ever have believed possible, his ideal Fairy Princess,—of the charmed Castle in whose woods he now walked—could ever have been.

What wonder his thoughts were entirely occupied by her. So occupied, indeed, that it was not until she was close to—almost touching—him that he knew she was there.

When he did know he stood spellbound—speechless—utterly unable to cope with a situation so manifestly impossible.

For this was not the Bethia Maitland that he believed had entirely captivated him; but another Bethia—even more enthralling still.

A Bethia blushing and hesitating—shy—diffident—even humble—with the most attractively curling eyelashes down drooped upon cheeks flushing and paling. . . A Bethia with sunshine caught and held in strands—curling also—of hair the colour of corn-fields ripe for harvest, raising eyes, like blue speedwell flowers softened by dew, deprecatingly. . .

A Bethia captivating not only body, but heart, soul and spirit. . . .

“ Mr. Clegg,” at last she stammered, and at the sound of the tremor in her voice he had much ado with himself not to take her in his arms as he would have done a child . . . “ I . . . there is something I . . . I must say to you. . . . ”

“ Don’t distress yourself, Miss Maitland,” so much self-repression made his voice sound stern, “ I have a sort of glimmering of what you want to say. . . . Shall we take it as said ? ”

“ No . . . I *must* say I am sorry . . . beg your pardon. . . . ”

“ For Heaven’s sake, don’t. . . . I—I was a fool and misunderstood you just now. . . . It’s for me to apologise to you—I assure you. . . . ”

“ But,” and there was—surely?—a gleam in her eyes as if a ray of sunshine had touched the blue speedwells, “ it . . . it’s not only just now . . . but—but what I said before . . . my unjustifiable accusations. . . . ”

“ That was nothing,” he interrupted hastily; “ I’d likely have felt just the same—in your place.”

“ No, you wouldn’t,” she contradicted with decision. “ A man would never have been so petty and mean. . . . I hate myself for it . . . and it’s only right—after being such a pig—I should say so and. . . . ”

“ It was very natural,” he again interrupted, “ and I entirely sympathise with your feeling as you do. . . . ”

“ Did,” Bethia interposed quickly.

“ Well I allow I would far rather put it in the past . . if I may ?”

And Bethia, with those honest grey eyes looking straight in her own, understood there was more—much more—behind it than the question implied, but gave it no answer.

At least not in words.

CHAPTER XXV.

EXTRACT FROM MYSIE CUNINGHAM'S DIARY.

Can Mr. Patrick be of German Origin and a SPY?

.
It is now several weeks since I entered these words in my Diary, for my thoughts have been so chaotic that I have not felt equal to the effort of expressing them in literary form.

Life is, certainly, very uncertain; and events, often, most perplexing. Other people have remarked this before, I believe, but it has come to me quite as my own observation—and, indeed, I doubt if anyone has had as much reason to remark it as I.

What makes present circumstances so peculiarly trying for me is that I cannot say anything to anyone—excepting to Adeline. For, of my own accord, I locked my secret in my breast and have never (even to my dear mother) breathed one word of it.

But I have not yet mentioned the immediate cause of my distress and increased anxiety, which is: firstly, that news came from the Front that Jim Maitland was wounded.

No words can attempt to describe the shock I experienced when, quite unprepared as I was, this terrible information all at once burst—like the bombs that we read of—into the room where I was seated at a meeting of the S. and S.F.A., where,

being Secretary, my position is so important. It is the more so as, the meetings being at Mrs. Patrick's, she cannot, lying on the sofa as she does, be considered to take the lead in the same way one naturally does when seated at a table with blotter, pens, ink, etc., before one, in an orderly and dignified manner.

Lady Maitland was at the meeting, too. And, of course, in the chair, being President. Mrs. Patrick is really chairwoman—for to my mind the term chairman is quite inadmissible applied to one of our sex—though unable, as I have already said, to do anything but lie on the sofa. But I never feel that the position of President is nearly so important as that of Secretary. And am always careful to let that be quite clear at our meetings, for with Mrs. Patrick an invalid and Lady Maitland being (I regret to say) so very unpractical, all the important work devolves upon me.

We had, I well remember, been discussing the case of Mrs. McFee, on whom I had to make a report. Her husband had been killed a short time previously, and the papers giving her the news—including one from His Majesty the King—had in some extraordinary way got mislaid. I blame Mrs. Baird, whose district Mrs. McFee is in, for the confusion. She declared she had sent the papers to me; but, as I am convinced I never received them, of course she did not. And at the meeting I naturally told her so very decidedly, when she actually had the bad taste to contradict me—before everyone—declaring she had posted them to me, and therefore I must have them.

Mrs. Baird, who is quite a common woman and speaks with a terrible accent (which I shall attempt by my phonetic spelling to convey some idea of) asserted that "as shure as deeth" (such an expression to use at an occasion of that kind) "I sent aw the papers to Miss Mysie there."

"To the Secretary, if you please," I interposed, as was only right.

"Secretairy or no Secretairy" (which was a most rude mode of expression) she answered, "thae papers wuz posted by me on Sat-turr-day. Mah neeburr Mar'get Orrr-r, bein wi' me, went roon to the Oh-feece an' kahn dee-pone. . . "

"There is no need to tell us all that, Mrs. Baird," I explained to her perfectly quietly and politely, "for nothing can alter the fact that I never received the papers. I think everyone will agree that the probability to be adduced is that you omitted to post. . . "

"And A'm ay tellin' ye that A did post," she shouted, getting very hot and angry.

"And I reply that you are mistaken," I answered, perfectly calm and cool.

Upon that she burst out in quite an unprovoked attack on me. Declaring in her common way (I hardly like to repeat the words, but feel it is better to do so): "Ye seem to think ye're omneescient and omnee-potent—in fack a sorrt o' God Almichty settin' perked up there ettlin' to use the wurrds o' some writer buddy. . . "

But here Lady Maitland interrupted her, which I thought a great mistake, as I was perfectly able to have given her the set down she required; and

indeed had it already formed in my mind, when her ladyship thought fit to intervene by expressing her great regret to hear Mrs. McFee's husband had been killed—an event which was nothing new, as it had happened more than a fortnight before.

“Poor thing,” she asked, turning to Mrs. Baird, and speaking with the same charming manner she seems to use to everyone alike, “is she in a terrible way about it?”

“No,” Mrs. Baird answered, no doubt wishing to be more disagreeable about the papers, “A’ll no say it’s the loss o’ her man she’s mindin’ so much. But she’s jist des’prit over the loss o’ thae papers yon Secretary, as she calls herself, knows naething about. Ye see she sort o’ hankered efter takin’ them roond to the Club an’ lettin’ aw the ither members see what a prood wumman she wuz—wi’ a letter frae the King himsel’ and all. She’s wild at not havin’ them—for there’s not one o’ them’ll believe her wi’oot.”

“Ye can well understand that,” says Miss Rankin, staring hard at me with those sharp, unpleasant eyes of her’s. “Had she heard from him lately, do you know?”

And I shall always believe the whole thing was a plot against me, for on that Mrs. Baird said:

“Ay, did she, for there was a letter fra him wi’ the ither ones—a letter from a queer place they ca’ed Hangur . . . Elhavver.”

“Would this be it then?” asks Miss Rankin, giving me another glare through her great horn spectacles. And taking up a packet from the table (though, of course, it may have been in her own

pocket, or that of Mrs. Baird), and placing it before Lady Maitland, "I noticed the address as it lay here in front of me. He was evidently in the Flying Corps, do you see, and it is, 'Hanger L. . . , Havre. . .'"

"I see," said Lady Maitland, "and all the missing papers along with it. . . ." And then they said something to each other in undertones, and laughed . . . no doubt at poor Mrs. Baird.

It was at this very moment that the interruption occurred which upset me so terribly, or naturally I could have easily explained that it could not be considered to be the Secretary's fault when papers of importance are sent wrapped in an ordinary letter in such an unbusiness-like way. (Though in my own mind I shall always be convinced I never received them, and think it most probable the whole thing was a plot.)

The interruption I allude to was the precipitate entrance of Alison and Bethia Maitland. The latter, on some excuse which I have forgotten, took her mother away with her, while the former remained to tell us—or rather it was Mrs. Patrick she seemed to think was the only one who needed to be told—the shocking news that Jim was wounded.

"We hope it is not very serious," she said, "as he is able to be sent home. Mother will go to London to meet him, I expect."

In spite of that assurance I felt myself go quite cold, and really do believe I should have fainted if Adeline, who sat by me, had not whispered:

"Buck up, Mysie, and don't look as if you were

going to be sick, or they'll all think it's because Mrs. Baird and Miss Rankin bested you over those papers you nearly lost."

They did nothing of the sort, and so I explained to her afterwards, but I feel quite sure if my mind had not been turned like that I would have quite fainted away.

Of course the meeting broke up, and we all parted, after registering a vote of sympathy with the Maitlands, which I suggested.

On the way home Adeline and I passed along the very same path—and through the identical gate, too, where I had given Jim the rosemary. Which, as I remarked to Adeline, was quite a coincidence.

"It was just here," I said, standing in the very same place, "and I had it in my hand, and held it out to him, like this,—you, as it might be, being he."

"And where was it that he said his way was yours?" she inquired.

"He did not quite say that," I corrected her; "he said my way was his."

"Well, it's much the same thing," she declared (which it is not, but there is not much arguing with Adeline, she is so sure she is always in the right)—"The real point is that, now he is the heir, it would be a splendid thing if your ways were the same, Mysie. And I advise you when the wounded hero arrives, not to let the grass grow under your feet. It's the chance of your life, and a jolly lucky one at that—so see you make use of it."

I drew myself up, of course, and said I hoped I had more sense of dignity—not to say propriety—

than to put myself forward in any way. Besides, as I told her, gentlemen are by no means attracted by girls who throw themselves at their heads.

“ Oh, don’t you believe it. That’s all bunkum,” she said. And I write down her words, even when they are not at all what I would have chosen myself—or, indeed, like to enter in my Diary. I wonder if it is being married to a doctor that makes Adeline so indelicate? (I was going to put coarse, but it is not a very nice word to use, and one can mean the same thing while using the more ladylike phrase.) Indelicate, I mean, in speaking of things not usually mentioned by people of refinement.

“ If you want to catch a man,” she went on to say, “ you must lay your nets for him just as if he was a salmon. So you find out how to do that, Mysie.”

No doubt she was thinking of the nets at the Loch Head, where the river runs in and the salmon nets are set. Dear Papa had a great deal to do with that, and we have shares in it still, which pay very well indeed, too, I know.

Naturally I put a stop to such talk pretty sharply. But it has been a good deal on my mind ever since. One cannot help that. And it is not unladylike to think things, if one is always careful not to say them; and to appear shocked at the slightest suggestion that one could have such thoughts. But it would be foolish not to take into consideration the advantages there would be in being (some day) Lady Maitland. And they would not be all on one side either, for I cannot help being aware that when dear Mamma is taken (and of course one knows

that no one can live for ever and, not having been married at all young, she is now over sixty)—I shall have a very large fortune indeed.

All these anxieties being in my mind, it is not peculiar that I have been very restless and unhappy lately. What with the terrible suspicion of Mr. Patrick and the suspense about Jim Maitland I am not at all myself, and have been quite unable to take any pleasure in my Diary.

For—I may as well admit at once—it is now well on in December, indeed, almost Christmas, and (for I am determined always to admit the whole truth in this Diary) I have not yet seen Jim Maitland to speak to. And this is very trying for me, as he came back several weeks ago—indeed, I could give the exact date, for I marked the event in my calendar.

Of course, this makes it very awkward and unpleasant for me, as each time I meet Adeline—and I seem always to be meeting her now—she asks me for news of my “beau,” as she calls him. So, to get away from that subject, I talk a great deal about Mr. Patrick, and try to pretend I am only interested in him. And, yesterday, when we had a very long talk, she most seriously impressed on me her opinion that I ought to take definite steps in the matter at once. The only question was how best to do so. Generally I am not much biassed by other people’s opinions; but, just now, I seem to be more under the influence of Adeline, who, each time I see her, insists more and more strongly how urgent it is that I should take action. At one time I tried to get away from Adeline by making a

friend of Gwyneth Seaton-Swinton. But Adeline did not like that, and my nerves are in no state at present for jars and disputes.

Besides, I do not believe I would ever be able to make a real confidante of Gwyneth, for she has taken such a ridiculous craze for the Maitlands and the Patricks, declaring they are "wonderful," and "so different from anyone she has ever known before." Indeed she went so far as to say to me that she thought I was extraordinarily fortunate to have known them all these years! Which is certainly a very peculiar idea and one that is quite new to me. She could give no satisfactory explanation of her strange notion, though I asked her to do so, but only kept vaguely saying: "Oh, I don't know, there's something so lovely about them;" and then talked about "atmosphere," which is silly; for what can that possibly mean? Indeed she admitted, when I taxed her with it, that she did not know herself; but felt sure "it must be something nice."

So, as I told her I fear it was only snobbishness and the liking to know people above her in station, and that no one would think any the better of her for making up to the Maitlands and trying to get in with them.

At that she lost her temper and spoke in a very rude way, seeming to think that I—who have much more experience, and am two years older than she (though she happens to be married) had not understood what she meant. But that was no doubt because no one likes to be called a snob, even when they are one. In consequence I had to give up all idea of changing my confidante, and so I told

Adeline, giving her my reasons quite truthfully. She was not, I must say, very pleasant about it at the time, but has been most agreeable since. More so, indeed, than I have ever known her to be before.

It is her opinion that, in my position here, and dear Papa having been such an important element in the place, that it is distinctly my duty to inform the authorities of what I saw, and all I suspect is going on at Heatherknowe. All the facts, indeed, as I entered them, in tabulated form, in this Diary. She has found out for me, too, who is the proper authority to whom I should make my report. She has drawn up a paper for me with full particulars and the last arrangements were made yesterday.

To-morrow I am to do it.

What we discussed last was whether or not I should adopt an incognito. I am averse to anything in the nature of pretence, at the same time there is no doubt that :

- (1) Being who I am,
- (2) Under the circumstances,
- (3) Taking into consideration the seclusion in which dear Mamma has elected to live.

It would not be advisable to bring my name before the Public and have everything in the papers, as it would certainly be if I went and made my report openly myself. At the same time Adeline is so certain that I ought not to conceal the information I have acquired and is convinced that it would be, as she expresses it, 'a great feather in my cap' were I found to have made such a very important discovery as that there is an Alien Spy living in our midst. And, indeed—as one may say—eating of

our bread and our salt. And, she says, the Maitlands would be the most grateful to me of all, they being the most intimate with the Patricks, so that my saving them would be a very great bond.

So we finally decided that I should go disguised, as that makes everything safe for me in every way. And avoids all risk of any kind whatever.

For, if it is found that Mr. Patrick is indeed a traitor to his country and a false friend (as I feel only too sure is the case) I can then reveal my identity and relate how I made the discovery. While, on the other hand, should I be found to be mistaken (which is most improbable) I can slip away quietly and no one will ever know it was I—except, of course, my one confidante—Adeline.

She it is who has undertaken to arrange my disguise. She has, it appears, a good deal of false hair—which I had no idea of—and assures me she can easily “get me up” so that no one can possibly guess who I am. Indeed it is quite an Adventure.

And I am to do it to-morrow.

The thought gives me a most peculiar sensation. But I do not mean Adeline to find out I am nervous. She said she did not believe I had the “pluck to carry it through.” So I shall certainly take care to show her she is entirely wrong. If I do feel fluttered—as I confess I am rather afraid that I may—I must fix my mind on the Heroines of History and remember I am emulating them. I do not know which one exactly, but there are so many of them that I feel sure there must be some one that I resemble. Indeed the day may come when this Diary

will be read by many who will be amazed at me, and learn from it a lesson that will, I hope, be of use to them.

That is, I think, the sort of thing that is put in Diaries by those who are on the eve, as I am, of a remarkable Adventure. . . And that reminds me that to-morrow—which is the Day of My Adventure—is Christmas Eve, which I regard as quite a coincidence—even possibly an omen.

END OF DIARY.

CHAPTER XXVI.

It was Christmas Eve. To the Maitlands it seemed almost impossible to believe that such a Christmas could be.

Formerly the House o' Maitland had always been crammed with relations and friends,—a merry family party, enjoying to the full the merriment of the season. Everyone had—of course—gone to church. But holly and mistletoe, turkey and plum-pudding, Santa Claus and snap-dragon, were certainly uppermost in the thoughts of those who would no doubt have been horrified had they paused to consider how entirely the festivity of the anniversary had come to usurp the place of the festival.

Yet, as Bethia and Jim went round in his little "run-about," which he was now once more able to drive himself, leaving parcels for all and sundry, Bethia admitted that there was "something to be said for this sort of thing instead of that." And Jim had grunted his acceptance, though not necessarily his endorsement, of the somewhat vaguely expressed sentiment.

"You see," she said, tucking the fur rug round her as she got into her place again after depositing a packet at "Balmoral," "Mother wants everyone working with us to have something—just to keep up the nice Xmassy feeling of . . ."

She stopped in mid-sentence as the car skidded rather badly at the Gordon's Head corner.

"Jimminy, I thought we were for the ditch that time—didn't you?" she said, laughing.

"Well, you see, my arm doesn't always respond, even now."

"It's really all right, though— isn't it?"

"H'm-h'm. . . I've no doubt it—and I—will be passed sound by the Board on the fifth."

"And then you'll go out again?"

"What else would I do?"

There was silence after that for a time.

"Let's draw Mrs. Patrick for tea," he suggested when the last of the parcels had been deposited in the village.

"Yes, do let's. Alison is out hospitaling so as to let someone else off, and I expect father and mother would enjoy much more having each other to themselves, with his only getting three days' leave after all."

"All right, then. Let's leave little Foozles" (little Foozles is the car) "at the inn and walk up. I don't much fancy Heatherknowe brae in the dark—though I suppose there'll be a moon with any luck."

Walking up the brae together, Bethia again returned to the thoughts busying her brain.

"D'you know, Jim," she said, "I do believe I like this sort of Christmas better than our usual sort."

"You may now. . . You wouldn't have then."

"No, p'raps I wouldn't. . . When I have children," she went on, in a tone of such seriousness that her brother chuckled inwardly, after the manner

of Brer Fox, . . . “ I’ll bring them up to understand the real meaning of things from the first.”

“ Poor little devils,” commented Jim.

“ No, but Jim—you know what I mean. . . I don’t see—now—how anything else will be possible.”

“ Again I say—poor little devils.”

“ But why?”

“ I can just see them, all sitting in a row with absolutely clean pinafores—and faces—while their most sedate mother explains to them how much superior the ‘inner meanings’—(not inner in the sense most appealing to them, mind you), are to such material trivialities as Xmas trees and plum-pudding.”

Bethia laughed too.

“ I suppose you see me haranguing them in a big frilled cap—like old Mother Tabbyskins in our picture-book. No, but seriously, Jim, won’t you feel like that, too, with your children?”

“ I can’t say I ever think about my children—not taking any, thank you,—for the present, at any rate.”

“ Don’t you? Why, I’ve thought about mine ever since—well, ever since I can remember, I think . . . I must say,” she went on retrospectively, “ they’ve gone through a good many phases. They began by being invariably naughty . . .”

“ Then let’s hope they’ll revert to it,” Jim pronounced with a decision that caused a relapse into laughter.

By this time they had reached Mrs. Patrick’s door—no longer hospitably open, as in summer,

but shut and closely curtained. It is not a door at which you ring a bell—that is, the initiated do not. You press a particular spring, concealed among stems of French honeysuckle—an invention of Mr. Patrick's for the aiding of "single-handed Sookie,"—and, as in Red Riding-hood, lift the latch and walk in. Finding yourself at once in that delightful atmosphere of warmth, pot-pourri and . . and "something else" . . which is the essential environment of Mary Patrick.

"How nice of you," her voice was at once heard welcoming them, adding, as they both came in laughing after a scuffle over depositing various parcels in the hall, "and do tell me the joke, for I've had a solitary day and need bucking up badly."

"We've been wrestling with B.'s children," Jim explained, and find them rather wearing."

"B.'s children?"

"Yes. She wants to bring them up as prigs, and I—being an uncle—object."

Then the door opened, and Susan—her face like polished crimson marble, and her red hair surmounted by the latest thing in mob caps, entered staggering under a tray, loaded with tea and its appurtenances, for which she had prepared no resting place. Matters being adjusted with the help of Bethia and Jim, and the boiling water safely poured on the tea, Mrs. Patrick inquired if, in their wanderings, they had seen anything of her Pat.

"No," said Jim, "has he strayed?"

"Very much so. He was to have been home for luncheon, and here's tea with never a sign of him."

“Poor deserted Mrs. Pat,” Bethia commiserated, “have you been all your lonies all that time?”

“That’s nothing to mind. Only sometimes I get the fidgets when I don’t know. And then I do wish we had the telephone.”

“Why haven’t you? I thought it was all settled.”

“Yes, it was to have been put in, then the war came and we didn’t, for it’s nicer to have the money for war things.”

It was said with a smile, for no one—not even Bethia—ever guessed how many small luxuries—most people would call them necessities—are given up because the money—it is often absurdly little—is wanted for Red Cross, or other “war things.”

“I wish,” Jim presently declared, with a sigh, “I could eat and drink more—but I can’t. Though I must say”—looking round with an air of satisfaction at the emptied plates of dropped scones and shortbread and the greatly diminished wedge of heather honey—“we have pretty well cleared the decks.” “Oh, I say,” with sudden compunction, “what about Mr. Patrick?”

“Susan has a reserve for him in the kitchen.” Mrs. Patrick assured him, “You surely don’t think I’d have let you eat up my Pat’s tea, you great greedy thing!”

“She ruffles up just like an old hen at the thought,” laughed Bethia, “What it must be to have a husband on one’s hands.”

“By the way, Mrs. Patrick,”—though why an entirely fresh subject should be ‘by the way’ is unexplained—began Jim, and launched into a

description of his visit to the Clegg Works and the wonderful discoveries he had made there.

Mrs. Patrick took great credit to herself for preserving an absolutely unmoved countenance on receiving information already well known to herself and her husband. And for not allowing her glance to wander—that is not visibly, for she had been less than woman had it not done so overtly—to Bethia sitting nursing El Khat with an appearance of almost too ostentatious indifference.

An interruption to Jim's eulogies of John Clegg came at last with Mrs. Patrick's exclamation of "Ah here he is at last,"—for her quick ear had caught the sound of his footstep almost before it could be heard,—and the entrance of a somewhat jaded and exhausted looking Mr. Patrick.

"Well, here you are at last, you Macfarlane's goose," was her greeting, "whatever have you been doing all this time?"

"It's not fair to receive me with abuse," he expostulated, "if you only knew what I've been through. . but give me a cup of tea first. . I'm that droothie. . and I'll tell you, for I've had an exceedingly odd experience."

"Tell about it."

"Certainly, indeed I'm simply longing to tell—but first " . . and he drained a huge breakfast cup of strong tea, plentifully seasoned with sugar and cream, at one draught and held it out to be replenished.

"Man alive, but that's fine," he remarked with a huge sigh after swallowing the second jorum, "and now for my adventures. They are remark-

able," he prefaced, "so be prepared for some shocks."

"Why what have you been after?"

"It can hardly be held, even by such a severe Censor as you, Mary, that the shocks are of my own making. . but. . "

"Well, begin at the beginning and we three will be judge and jury as to that."

So Mr. Patrick began :

"Well, as arranged with your Worship," he said, "I went to speak to Dr. Wilsone-Browne, but found he was in Glasgow, and asked to see her—which, I need scarcely add, proved a work of supererogation as far as acquiring any information whatever. (That woman's a d—d fool, Mary," he complained parenthetically.)

"Well, Pat, *I* didn't make her so."

"I never said you did—but I'm sorry for the wretched man who owns her . . ."

"Or whom she owns. . ."

"Perhaps that does give more the lie of it. . . Well, any way, I was just going away, having thoroughly failed in my mission; and was turning over in my mind whether I'd time to get as far as Hysslop's before returning to luncheon—and you . . ."

"Oh, luncheon's quite sufficient. . ."

"No flippant interruptions from the Bench, please; this is a serious case . . . when the telephone bell rang; and, from Mrs. Wilsone-Browne's agitation, I gathered something serious had happened—though I was far from imagining what it was, or that it had anything to do with myself . . ."

“The witness’s reflections are not evidence, and he is requested to keep to the point.”

“Wait till you hear what a sharp point it is—and how it was trying to dig into me!”

“I am eager to hear—and so are B. and Jim. That’s why we implore you not to be discursive.”

“All right . . . only it’s not very easy, for really the whole thing was so . . . Well, well . . . I’ll get on as quick as I can. . . Where was I?”

“Mrs. Wilsons-Browne ‘on the ‘phone,’ as she’d express it herself.”

“Yes—to be sure. Well, she gasped and she gurgled . . . and exclaimed and vociferated declaring something was ‘quite impossible’—and that she could not, and would not—and, when finally rung off, subsided in a chair as white as a sheet and looking as if she was just going to faint. So I seized some brandy (we were in the consulting room) and gave her a dose. Perhaps, in the hurry, rather more than I meant—and she became tearful and confidential, and I gathered there was some fearful ‘upset,’ and that her husband had telephoned to say she was to come at once in the car. . . . At first I thought he was ill, but found out it wasn’t that, and—to cut a long story short (for the woman’s such a fool it took me ages to get a grain of sense out of her bushels of irrelevant rubbish) it appeared that, for some unexplained reason, Mysie Cunningham and Dr. Wilsons-Browne were at the Glasgow Infirmary, and he wanted his wife to come there at once in the car and fetch Mysie, but she was determined she would not. ‘Hadn’t you better at any rate, send for the car?’ I suggested, and she

did ; but even by the time it was at the door I was no nearer comprehending the situation. ‘ It’s that silly fool Mysie,’ she kept repeating. ‘ She has made a mess of it . . but nothing will induce me to get mixed up in it all.’ So at last, as the poor woman got more and more hysterical and was evidently in no fit state to do anything, I offered to go in the car and be of any use I could.

“ She jumped at the suggestion, gave me full—and quite lucid—instructions as to where I was to go ; and then—just as I was seated in her smart ‘ Limousine ’—got into a frightful state of agitation again, and screamed to me to get out. But, having escaped, I wasn’t going back ; so I just waved and nodded and went off, leaving her to high-strike on the door-step. As we glided down the High Street I saw Miss Rankin, coming out of Goudie’s, and—I really don’t know why—was seized with the impulse to get her to come with me. And am most thankful I did. Really she’s a wonder that woman. Not a word of explanation was required. ‘ Ye want me, Mr. Patrick ? Will I come ? To be sure.’

“ And there she was, seated beside me—paper bags from Goudie’s in hand—without a moment’s hesitation or demur. And I wasn’t sorry for the paper bags, either ; for the cookies they contained are the only luncheon we had. Now the rest of the story is so mad that I really don’t know how—or from which end—to tackle it.”

“ Couldn’t you just say how it happened ? What did you find when you got to the . . the Hospital, was it ?”

“ No. It was the Work House Infirmary. And

what we found was Dr. Wilsone-Browne, looking very stern and angry. . and an almost unrecognisable Mysie Cuningham. . . ”

“ But what on earth were they doing at the Infirmary ? ”

“ Well, that’s what requires beginning at the other end, it seemed to me, to explain.”

“ Begin at it then—for I’m utterly bewildered.”

“ Well, it appears—so Miss Rankin and I gathered, bit by bit, from the remnant (for really you can call it nothing else) of Mysie Cuningham—that the wretched girl had got into her head—crazed, I suppose, by what she’s read in the papers and heard other fools saying—that someone was a spy. So she had gone to the Head of the Police in Glasgow to make a report. . . In this, so I gather, she’d been aided and abetted by Mrs. Wilsone-Browne; who had devised the insane scheme of disguising Mysie in a wig and blue spectacles. . . ”

“ Good Heavens! What an idea! What she must have looked like ! ” And his audience laughed as they thought of it.

“ Yes, I imagine she must. . but by the time I saw her she was somewhat differently disguised,” and Mr. Patrick smiled grimly.

“ Do be quick and go on,” urged his wife.

“ It was yourself interrupted me.”

“ Yes, I know—but go on. We’re not particular as to how—as long as you unravel the skein.”

“ It’s in such a jolly tangle in my own mind that’s not very easy. . Where was I ? . The wig and spectacles? Well, in this disguise; and, I should imagine, in considerable agitation, she had

presented herself at the police station, where they were as it happened, extremely busy. The Inspector, who was just hurrying off, having been wired for to investigate some very important case, saw her for a few minutes, and came to the conclusion she was either a lunatic or a spy, handed her over to an underling who interpreted (rightly or wrongly) what he had said to mean that 'the woman' (it seemed to disturb Miss Cuninghame very much to have been described as a woman) was to be searched and, if necessary, placed under supervision. Consequently, the wretched girl was handed over to certain females, who turned her inside out, and found that she wore a dark wig, whereas her hair was fair, and that her underclothing was marked with initials that did not correspond with the name she had given. Her address she refused to give. On that information the 'officer' had decided the safest place to put her till his chief's return was the Workhouse Infirmary; and, as her conduct under the drastic treatment to which she had been subjected convinced them more and more that she was a lunatic, to the lunatic ward she was taken; where, having scrubbed her, hair and all (that last seemed to be considered the crowning ignominy)—with carbolic, she was put into a pauper's nightdress, and so violent did her behaviour then become, forcibly secured in a pauper's bed. And there Dr. Wilson-Browne, going a round of inspection, had discovered her."

"How too dreadful—poor wretched girl—but surely they'd no right to treat her in such a horrible way?"

“ I don’t know about that. . . but I’d strongly advise her not to raise the question.”

“ Why not ? . . It was surely abominable to. . . ”

“ I’m afraid she brought it all on herself—and would gain nothing by making public the story of her folly—or worse.”

“ But why on earth did she do it ? ” asked Jim.

“ Yes, and who did she suspect of spying ? ”

“ I didn’t find that out till we were bringing her home in the motor. Indeed I don’t believe I’d ever have found out at all if it hadn’t been for Miss Rankin, who ought to have been a detecitve. She seemed to grasp the whole situation at once. And dealt with it in a way that was, to my feeble mind, little short of miraculous. To begin with, when we got to the Infirmary I didn’t even recognise our trim, self-satisfied Mysie in the dejected little heap, sobbing helplessly, with limp hair straying dishevelled over a face swollen and disfigured with passionate crying, pinioned into a workhouse bedstead, in a white-washed ward : a text over its head and a grim and stalwart nurse by its side.

“ Before I’d mastered the elementary fact that it was really our self-confident little neighbour, Miss Rankin had got a ‘ furrum grip,’ as she would say herself, of the whole situation ; and had the Doctor’s opinion, the matron’s suspicions, the wardress’s views, and—most marvellous of all—Miss Mysie Cuninghame’s attitude and action, at the tips of her fingers.

“ The Doctor was in a great hurry to be off, as he had an operation at the Hospital for which, as he had not liked to leave the wretched little object all

alone, he was already late; so I'd no opportunity of questioning him, and knew nothing till, as I say, we were in the motor. For Miss Rankin had me whisked out of the ward 'in a jiffy,' and I sat wondering alone in the waiting room till she appeared marshalling a more or less reinstated—but extraordinarily chastened—Miss Mysie.

“ ‘Let's get out o' here,’ was all she said, and out we got, and into Mrs. Wilsone-Browne's Limousine as quickly as possible. Seated opposite that oddly assorted couple I had—I think I may say—about the most extraordinary experience of a long and varied life.

“ ‘Now, tell me what it all means,’ I said, cheerfully; having done what Miss Rankin calls ‘happed up’ the two ladies with a rug, and, at her instigation, lighted a cigarette—for which I was extraordinarily thankful.

“ Miss Rankin's answer was ominous, but hardly enlightening: ‘God forgive the gurrl,’ she said, ‘for I can not.’

“ ‘Why, what's she been doing?’ I asked, and found myself patting poor dejected Mysie's hand, and telling Miss Rankin she mustn't be too hard on her.

“ ‘It's not me that's hard—it's hurr that's jist so much shallocks and stinkin' billy in a field o' gude corrn. I hae seen many a queer thing—but this beats aw' . . . To think she could hae' found it in her hair'rrt to devise sich thoughts o' them that's so far beyond hurr that she's no comprehension o' them at all.’”

“ I tried to say that if she couldn't comprehend

it was hard to expect comprehension of her. But, 'Oh, I suppose ye'll be for sayin' ye like it—an' make excuses for the tawpie' . was her angry retort. And I—quite in the dark as to the drift of her animadversions—went blundering on, only making matters worse, by my elaborate attempts to soothe her, and prove that no one can be expected to do more than expect of others what they would do themselves.

" 'Oh, I know that fine,' she retorted angrily, 'we all measure each other's peas by oor ain peck. But I cannot see how that's to excuse sich blatant eediocy. . There's no justification for the peck o' peas she's displayed to the whole country-side. Oh ay, mak' ex-cuse-es for her,' she railed at me, as I droned on, patting away at the cold little hand that still lay limply in mine, 'ye mind me o' naethin' but a bumbee dying under a dockin leaf, settin' haverin' there.'— " 'Well, I don't see,' I still insisted, 'what good it's doing to harry this poor child now she's thoroughly miserable.—We'll gain nothing by that.'

" 'No,' she agreed, wth another of the proverbs with which she's stuffed as full as her Scotch bun with plums, 'I ken fine 'fleyin' a hen's no the way to grip it' . . but there's moments when ye're driven by yer anger like withered leaves before a winter's blast, an' I'm jist that infewriated I've lost hold on myself aw' thegither!'

" Then a voice I could hardly recognise as Miss Mysie's whispered huskily :

" 'Miss Rankin's quite right, Mr. Patrick. . and. . and I wonder at you're caring to take my

hand after all I've. . . I've done. . . '

" 'I was just wonderin' at that too,' agreed Miss Rankin, glaring at me through the great horn spectacles she'd produced and put on as, I suppose, motor goggles—though the motor was shut.

" And at that Mysie's hand was withdrawn, and hiding her face in her pocket handkerchief she began sobbing again. I felt quite angry with Miss Rankin; and, I suppose, said something that showed it, for she turned upon me and asked if 'there was no sich thing as righteous wr-rath?'

" 'Oh yes,' I admitted, 'But. . . '

" 'Hoots! But me, no buts,' she interrupted, 'If ye turned the sur-cumstances heeds and thraws an' it wuz me—(or Leddy Maitland, would mebbe bring it home to ye more!)—instidd o' yerself she'd been hatchin' her plots for, ye'd no find it sae easy to forgive—and be itchin' (as I am) to gie that hand its paiks, in place o' strokin' an' pattin' it aboot. . . so ye would!'

" 'I don't know what you're talking about,' I grumbled bewildered. . . And then the storm broke, and she told me the 'stürry' that—well, that's really so unbelievable you must either laugh at it—or cry!'"

"I prefer to do the laughing," Mrs. Patrick declared.

"My dear, wait till you hear it."

And then he told her of Mysie's discoveries, and how he, himself, was the spy she had gone to inform against.

"But she must be mad!" Jim exclaimed. "I

always knew she was a fool," he added, " But never imagined her to be a malicious one."

(And that—it is really pathetic—was all that the hero of the rosemary episode thought—or cared—for the girl whose way he had, as we know, desired might be his!)

" She must have somehow drifted into it," Mrs. Patrick was of opinion. " It's not credible she did it out of sheer malice. . "

" Aren't you angry?" Bethia asked in amazement.

" No, why should I be? It's so absurdly far away from the truth that I could laugh—only to realise anyone can be so far away is too tragic for laughter. I strongly suspect, Pat, you'll find Mrs. Wilsone-Browne, Mysie's confidante, as she calls it, has a finger in the pie."

" Ah!" Mr. Patrick's exclamation was expressive of sudden enlightenment. " I do believe that's the key to it! And not only a finger, Mary, but her whole fist!"

" You think that would explain it?" asked Jim.

" It might. She's a dangerous woman I am sure—and that she has a thoroughly bad influence one can feel."

" Well, Mary, you'll have to oust the influence that's all. . You and Miss Rankin. . . "

" Then Miss Rankin wasn't so unforgiving after all?"

" No. . . that woman's got the warmest heart under the roughest manner, and guarded by the sharpest tongue I've ever known. Miss Rankin took Mysie back with her, declaring she must 'get

her redd up' before she showed herself at home, and that, as Janet had gone out for the day, there'd be no difficulty.

"Ye'll be able to wash yer face and sort yer hair and get a cup o' tea at my hoose," she said to her quite kindly, adding—with that funny twist of her mouth as if she had something that she would call 'werch' in it—"my wurrd, lassie, ye were gey near tasting what treacle peerie's like wi' yer parritch in place o' mince'pies and plum-pudding to yer Chrissymas denner."

"What on earth's treacle peerie?" inquired Bethia, who had sat silently listening.

"It's a horrible concoction of treacle and water that poor people 'get to their parritch' when they can't afford milk."

"Poor little Mysie, there must surely be something else to account for her folly," Mrs. Patrick said thoughtfully, "for though she was always rather a goose, I don't really think. . ."

"No, Mary mine, you never do. You always believe them all to be infinitely better than they are."

"Ask mother what she thinks of her," said Bethia.

And then Mrs. Patrick told them of Lady Maitland's having said someone in Geesekirk would be left 'flapping goose quills to the end of the chapter.'

"Well she has flapped them to some purpose this time, confound her," Jim grumbled. "Imagine what her mind must be to have devised such a calumny."

“Poor foolish, mis-guided Miss Mysie.”

“And that’s all you say when the little devil’s been plotting to destroy you.”

“Oh, she doesn’t understand. One can only be sorry for her and her. . .”

“Second class thoughts,” finished Jim.

“All the same, if she really believed I was a spy,” Mr. Patrick suggested, “I suppose she was quite right to say so.”

“Only how could she think it?”

“And even if she did, why not be honest and straightforward about it? No, Mr. Patrick, it isn’t to be believed that anyone who could do such a trick is a . . .”

“A white man? It does seem rather impossible. But I suspect, as Mary suggests, that the unfortunate little wretch has been the tool of that much cleverer knave, our good doctor’s wife. I imagine,” he went on, a half-sarcastic, half-regretful smile twitching his expressive, clean-shaven lips, “my signals (in reply to search-lights!) must have been the night that scoundrel of an El Khat (purring away on Miss B.’s knee there, as if he did not know what discontent means) went out on the bust, and I hunted him all through the shrubbery with my electric torch, because you, my Mary, thought you heard his dulcet tones calling to be let in. . . It really is very funny.”

“I don’t see it’s a bit funny,” Jim answered resentfully. “It’s beastly to think anyone could have such nauseous ideas and such loathly motives. And makes one afraid that perhaps B. is right and bits of us *are* ‘made in Germany.’”

“ Oh, don’t Jim—I said it, but I couldn’t bear to think it was true.”

“ What astonishes me,” he went on, turning to Mr. Patrick, “ is Miss Rankin. I’d have thought reprisals much more in her line.”

“ In theory, yes, she’d be all in favour of them,” Mr. Patrick agreed—“ that’s her heredity. But in practice she’s totally different. Her real goodness of heart intervenes and upsets all her theories of vengeance. Honestly I believe she is the one to deal with the problem, and, unless I’m much mistaken, she’ll do so effectively. Nothing short of her drastic language would penetrate through all that self-conceit. And, in spite of the vinegar and aloes of her tongue, the old lady is kindness itself—and further along ‘the right rodd,’ as she would say herself, than most.”

When brother and sister got up to go Bethia lingered to murmur a few words in Mrs. Patrick’s ear while the two men went out.

“ I have something to ’fess to you,” she said shyly kneeling down by the sofa to deposit El Khat in his place. And, noting the colour flooding the only bit of cheek and neck she could see, Mrs. Patrick had no difficulty in guessing what the confession was to be. When it was over, and kisses of mutual understanding had supplied the many lacking words, Bethia rose to go.

“ I’m tired and disheartened with everything,” she said dolorously, “ after that horrid skunk Mysie thinking like that of Mr. Patrick and you—who have always championed and stuck up for her. . I don’t feel as if it mattered what any of us are.”

But of course it matters—you know it does, B. . . it matters enormously what all of us—each of us—are.”

“ You do really and truly think so ? ”

“ I am sure of it. ”

“ Matters to what you call “ the Big Scheme of things ? ”

“ Yes—And matters to. . to God. ”

.

Outside the two men stood at the door, looking out on the clear, frosty night.

“ I can’t think how you and Mrs. Patrick can be so forgiving,” Jim said abruptly.

“ We’re not. . I mean one gets not to feel it like that. . only to be sorry that everyone doesn’t understand. . And above all that anyone can possibly misunderstand so hopelessly as that poor, miserable, little Mysie. . and. . and Germany. . ”

“ Germany ! ” Jim echoed, “ Isn’t that a bit thick, Mr. Patrick ? ”

“ Yes—even Germany and the Germans,” Mr. Patrick repeated, adding after a pause, as if to himself, “ be sorry even for Germany—for can anything be more tragic than, with your eyes open, wilfully and sinfully, to have taken ‘ the wrang rodd ? ’ ”

“ I suppose,” Jim hesitated, “ for I. . I’m beginning to get a sort of glimmer of what you mean—I suppose it is she—Mrs. Patrick—who has made you see things like that. . ? ”

“ Yes. . bother her ! By being it herself. For, thank goodness, she seldom attempts to say it. ”

Well," he went on, as Bethia now joined them, "Good-night, Jim—God bless you, my boy."

"Good-night," Jim responded, adding as he felt the warm grip of the great, rough hand grasping his, "And thanks—ever so much."

"Don't thank me—it's not me—thank her and. ." he stood gazing up to where the moon, sailing high in the heavens, transformed the world—its steadfast hills, its marvellous silvered loch, its stately pine trees, and graceful, feathery birches, its great stretch of moor intersected by the bonnie Water o' Maitland—by its wonderful glamour, into dreamland, "thank God. . Ay, thank God for *making* us see that the whole thing resolves itself into the old crucial question 'What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own Soul?' "

THE END.

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